# Educational Expectations in an Urban American Indian Community:

# A Phenomenological Investigation

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For any part of this work that may be mine, I still have never walked alone. It also belongs to (in order of appearance):

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## Abstract

Educational Expectations in an Urban American Indian Community: A Phenomenological Investigation. This investigation uses narrative to explore the educational experiences and expectations of 10 urban, Midwestern United States American Indians. Results include insights into community-based evaluation, suggest an emerging field of Indigenous Educational Evaluation, and offers a model and suggestions that may help guide future evaluations of educational programs serving American Indian students.

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*A student and I were driving home from a summer program through a dense pine forest. A long, comfortable quiet between us fostered taking in the surrounding beauty. After a time, this young man told me he wanted to study in college "how the trees talk to each other." I smiled from the inside out at his recognition of the living nature of the trees. He inherently, and without doubt, went beyond a Western view which might question "if" the trees communicate. To him, that was a given. Instead, he wanted to now "how." When bringing this story to other American Indians, they nod knowingly, as if to say, "of course." Everything is connected.*

## Chapter 1: Problem

### Introduction

Accountability is trending currently in education and has become a crucial component of maintaining the public trust. However, the questions remain "What are we measuring?" and "Why?" When reviewing measures used to determine successes and failures for Indigenous students across current, multiple, widely accepted measures of academic success, large achievement gaps exist. Graduation rates show Indigenous students graduating at 82% compared with 94% for White students. Indigenous students are enrolled in college at a rate of 24.9% compared to 42.1% for White students. In addition, Indigenous students are identified for service through special education in disproportionate ratios at 16.5% compared to 13.4% for White students (U.S. Department of Education, 2015; U.S. Department of Commerce, 2015; Stark, 2015).

**Need and Rationale**

The need for interventions to narrow these gaps is not in question, however, current measurements of success of programs and initiatives in educational settings tend to focus on teacher efforts or student standardized test scores, rather than a more expansive and holistic view of educational programs. The limitations of standardized testing and the fluidity of the measurements of teacher effectiveness, especially relative to programs designed to serve Indigenous students, point to the need for more comprehensive evaluations of educational systems.

Evaluation as a way of measuring a program or intervention as a whole, and as a profession, has a relatively recent presence, particularly in education (S. I. Donaldson & Lipsey, 2006). What particularly seems to be missing in designs of evaluation for educational programs are holistic, valid models that could serve to identify and measure how programs operate relative to purpose and stakeholders' expectations. Schools, systems, teachers, families, communities, and even students themselves are often blamed for perceived failures and unmet goals (Crandall & Kutz, 2011). How to comprehensively evaluate an educational program becomes even more complex when examining those programs designed to serve Indigenous students in urban settings (Lopez, Vasquez Heilig, & Schram, 2013).

Measurements of educational effectiveness for programs designed to serve Indigenous students fall short in meeting the needs of the students and of the community. The educational community needs to be able to understand why Indigenous education needs to be treated uniquely. The combination of evaluation, educational evaluation, and

Indigenous approaches are interrelated. A thorough examination of these histories and perspectives and their effects on evaluation of Indigenous education programs is required.

**A Note Regarding Identifiers**

The term Indigenous will be used to represent the tribal peoples who were present on lands in North American and elsewhere before European colonizers. Indigenous is inclusive of those who identify as American Indian, Native American, and Alaskan Native, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, Maori, First Nations, Aboriginal Canadian, Aboriginal Australian or Aboriginal African. Despite the overarching label, there is no intention to reduce the sovereign nations of the many Indigenous peoples with their unique languages, cultures, and worldviews into one category. When identified in the works cited, a more specific label may be used to identify the group to which the author(s) refer and/or will defer to the original author's terminology.

**Nature and Purpose of the Study**

It is essential to develop an evaluation process for educational programming in consultation with the community in order to identify attributes of the program or system including philosophy, goals, leadership, pedagogy, curriculum, etc., that are responsive to, and reflective of, the cosmologies of the communities themselves. Merging the fields of evaluation, educational evaluation and Indigenous evaluation can serve to guide an emerging field of Indigenous educational evaluation to serve the specific needs of the American Indian community.

This work is a foundational exploration of educational ontology and axiology from an Indigenous perspective. It is intended as a resource for further investigations and

the evolution of practices appropriate to the educational evaluation of urban Indigenous populations.

Identifying effective processes to evaluate secondary education programs serving Indigenous students in order to discover which means and methods are most efficacious and worthy of replication is challenging. The purpose of this work is to explore what members of one Indigenous urban community's expectations are for education. The phenomenological research design makes use of qualitative approaches such as grounded and emergent theory and an empowerment evaluation framework. As is appropriate to work within Indigenous evaluation methodology, efforts have been made to see that metrics reflect the values and expectations of the population served (Fetterman, 2001; American Indian Higher Education Consortium, 2009). The thoughts and beliefs of community members were examined regarding the role and purpose of education for urban Indigenous students.

The study identified participants who are connected in multiple ways to Indigenous education in one urban, mid-western area of the United States. Participants' perspectives were sought regarding ideal educational outcomes for Indigenous students. The responses have helped to understand the connections between participants and the ideal of community ownership of the directions in education and measures of success. Results provide a basis for future development of a comprehensive, community-based evaluation model for educational programs designed to serve Indigenous learners.

This investigation is a descriptive examination of the educational expectations of stakeholders in one particular urban American Indian community. It does not aspire to compare or contrast with another group or community or a control group but instead

examines perceptions, thoughts, experiences, hopes, dreams, and expectations. The data identifies trends, themes, and connections rooted in grounded theory about expectations for education in this American Indian community.

The guiding questions are “What was your educational background?” and “What are your expectations and hopes for educational programs serving Native American high school students in an urban setting?” A community member has helped guide the development of the questions and through collaborative discussions concluded that academic study on expanding ways of measuring Indian Education outcomes was needed.

**Conceptual Framework**

Beginning with a historical overview of Indigenous relations and governmental policy, this work synopsizes the social and political influences that contributed to the present conditions in Indigenous education. Touching on contemporary responses to American Indian historical and political influences, it includes a brief study of the development and the articulation of philosophical and theoretical perspectives in Indigenous ways of knowing. The purpose of evaluation and its historical limitations in Indigenous education will be reviewed. The melding of educational evaluation, evaluation in Indigenous communities, and Indigenous education into a new framework of Indigenous Educational Evaluation will be proposed.

The investigative approaches used are intended to be comprehensive, community-based, and is for – and of – those being served by the educational programs. Therefore, the most basic questions about the purpose of education must also originate in the Indigenous community. Grounded theory, as a research methodology, will be explored theoretically and rationale will be provided for employing such an approach in this study

as a foundation for models of evaluating educational programs serving Indigenous high school students.

While the study is designed to inform future development of empowerment evaluation models for determining the effectiveness of an educational program serving Indigenous students, it is limited to the perspectives of the individuals included in the study. The perceptions of participants are not generalizable to Indigenous communities in whole or to those specifically situated in urban areas. It is hoped, however, that making use of empowerment processes to situate an evaluation will provide data that will continue to engage community members in discussion about the very foundations of their educational goals and that such an approach will be incorporated in future evaluation studies.

This investigation bridges a number of academic fields and doesn't fall squarely into any one discipline. It is research in that it aims to ask a question that has not yet been asked, delves into information – in this case interviews – in an attempt to contribute to understanding of a phenomenon, yet it does not compare it to other work nor does it compare it against itself. It contributes to the field of evaluation, yet is not an evaluation. Additionally, it aims to provide a model for the way that work may be done in an emerging field of Indigenous Educational Evaluation.

The fields of evaluation, educational evaluation, Indigenous evaluation, and the emerging field of Indigenous educational evaluation intersect and overlap, therefore, clarification of terms is warranted. These fields have existed in research and practice and continue to evolve.

Evaluation, in this work, refers to an ongoing systematic review and determination of value of the whole of a program or intervention. Educational evaluation applies evaluation to a program or intervention designed to support or to educate students directly. Assessment in education, by contrast, tends to focus on a particular measurable point, such as an individual test (ACT) or singular outcome (graduation rates). Assessment may be one of multiple sources of information used as part of an evaluation. Indigenous evaluation addresses the unique circumstances of Indigenous people and the ways in which it is recommended to do evaluation in order to be respectful of the cultural experiences and expectation of the communities. In contrast to these established fields, Indigenous educational evaluation could be considered an emerging cross-disciplinary field, as thus far, there have been no documented studies that provide direction on how to blend evaluation of educational programs with Indigenous educational philosophy and Indigenous evaluation methodology.

The conceptual framework employed includes and is based in the work of Fetterman and his theories of empowerment evaluation and LaFrance, Nichols, & Kirkhart (2012) and their theories of evaluation in indigenous communities. Fetterman (2001) describes 21st century evaluation as increasingly more collaborative partnerships between the evaluator and the community, staff, or other stakeholders. Feedback loops exist in order to ensure that the true and authentic voices of participant evaluators and community members are represented. Additionally, every effort will be made to represent multiple worldviews in evaluation studies. The work of the evaluator is to become a facilitator for the community's empowerment and investment in their own projects and self-sufficiency.

While researchers and evaluators have not been historically welcome in Indian Country, the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC) developed a framework to guide evaluators. Core values include that evaluators should center any evaluation in American Indian communities in the ways that Indigenous knowledge is created, consider the importance of context and the place-based nature of Indigenous communities, recognize individual strengths, the centrality of family and community, and the relevance of tribal sovereignty (American Indian Higher Education Consortium, 2009). Making use of the guidelines from AIHEC as well as foundations from Indigenous theorists, this work, including both the results of the interviews, as well as an analysis of the process used in engaging with the community, proposes to create a model for how the work of evaluation might be done in American Indian communities.

# Chapter 2: Literature Review

*The group of boys – young men, really – were very close-knit; tight like kin. They looked out for each other, did well in school, were respectful and funny, explored and expressed culture through drum, dance, and ceremony. They took Native Literature classes together. They tutored younger Native kids after school. They were leaders.*

*One of them started to experience difficulties outside of school. His family needed him and he began to travel back and forth to his home reservation. His attendance started to decline and his grades dropped. I offered support, worked hard to help him catch up when he returned; did what little I could.*

*Soon, the other members of this group also started to fall behind. They were still polite and kind, and were involved in cultural practices. Again, I offered support. I asked some questions, observed, and listened. After a while, I began to understand.*

*The boys were holding themselves back academically. They were not conscious about what they were doing but instead it seemed inherent to them and they way they saw the world. They did not want to leave their friend behind. They did not want to move forward while he was struggling. They, without discussing it amongst themselves, started to draw back so that none would stand out in front of the other. They were going to wait for him.*

## Current Realities of Educational Outcomes for Indigenous Students

Researchers have attempted to identify causes for gaps in educational outcomes for Indigenous students. Causation is difficult to isolate or ascertain.

Exploration of what makes a positive difference in Indigenous education highlights some key approaches. Studies have been done in immersion schools

(Geuvremont & Kohen, 2011), post-secondary institutions (Anuik & Gillies, 2012), and reservation communities (McCarty, 1989). Bang et al. (2014) has explored aspects of urban Indigenous education as it relates to place and heterogeneous groups of Indigenous peoples in the Midwestern United States. Indigenous scholars in New Zealand (Bishop, Berryman, Wearmouth, & Peter, 2012) have provided some foundational exploration for secondary Indigenous education, but this work is limited in its scope, relating primarily to teacher preparation and development.

While specific approaches have been assessed for efficacy, there is little research available identifying or verifying the efficacy of comprehensive programs that work for Indigenous students in urban secondary schools. Furthermore, of the studies identifying best practices in teaching Indigenous students which could provide guidance to determining outcome measures of evaluation, the bulk are confined to relatively homogenous, non-urban populations and rarely address education from a systems or programmatic approach. Hohepa (2013) urges the assumption of heterogeneity within groups often perceived to be homogenous. In larger urban centers, the Indigenous populations are most often comprised of people of many nations, tribes, bands, traditions, languages, and customs. Yet, many Indigenous education programs aim to serve all these students under one umbrella. Therefore, addressing the achievement gap for Indigenous students, particularly in an urban setting, and defining and measuring successes in an educational setting will require an approach that is more holistic than what has been done thus far. The approach should be methodical and hold up to the scrutiny of funders, academic peer review, that of other stakeholders, but above all, the Indigenous community itself.

Navigating life within existing social systems, especially for marginalized populations is rooted deeply in history. For Indigenous students in North America, their history is contextualized by American Indian nations having been subjected to invasion by immigrants, primarily Europeans. The subsequent genocide and attempted genocide, forced separation of children from family and community, mandatory assimilation through federal governmental policy and practice, and methodical limitations of freedoms resulted in disenfranchisement and trauma that is still felt today (Beaulieu, 1990; Jeffries & Singer, 2003; Reyhner & Eder, 1989).

Providing frameworks for systems that meet the needs of Indigenous communities, as expressed by Indigenous communities, is essential to bring dreams, aspirations, and pathways into balance with measurement of success and accountability. A crucial part of those systems is the ways in which the successes or failures of such systems are assessed. Research in Indigenous communities must directly reflect goals and intended outcomes as expressed by the communities themselves (Demmert, McCardle, Mele-McCarthy, & Leos, 2006), including evaluation systems in educational institutions using outcomes-oriented backward design. Demmert, McCardle, Mele-McCarthy, and Leos go further in stating the "new and better measures" and "innovative approaches to the integration of qualitative and quantitative research" in education are needed and are, in fact, priorities (2006, p. 100).

**History, Governmental Policy and Practice**

It is necessary to acknowledge the effects of Indigenous history on contemporary living and learning. The effects, some of which are labeled as historical and educational trauma, have been identified as deterrents to academic success (Brave Heart & DeBruyn,

1998; Grant & Gillespie, 1993; Morsette, 2012). Historical and educational trauma may be framed as the emotional response to collective unresolved grief due to group trauma and subsequent discrimination, racism, and oppression (Brave Heart, Chase, Elkins, & Altschul, 2011).

The United States government has historically embraced policies designed to minimize interference by the original inhabitants of the lands determined to be parts of its expansionist designs. These policies and practices directly affected all aspects of traditional Indigenous life, including the process of education and ultimately in the schooling of Indigenous students. During different stages of governmental policy, education had been a key weapon of the government in attempts to de-indigenize Native peoples, working to eliminate their sovereignty and assimilate them to the colonizer mindset and make way for land and power acquisition (Beaulieu, 1990; Child, 1998; Grinde, 2004; Spring, 2012; Szasz, 1999).

Policies utilized by European colonizers and American government and churches, included concepts such as “Manifest Destiny” to justify colonization without regard for the needs, wants, or wishes of the original inhabitants of North America (Brayboy, 2005; Grinde, 2004). Genocide was encouraged by policy and practiced under these justifications. For those who were not assassinated or were subjected to bounties placed on their heads, metaphorically and literally in terms of payments made for scalps, assimilation became the only safe alternative, achieved mainly through the vehicles of churches and schools. Boarding and missionary schools took children away from their homes. While away from their families, their homes, and all things familiar, children were punished for using their language. They were made to wear European-style clothing

and had their hair cut, which in many Indigenous communities was a sign of death and grief. Education itself was designed mainly for creating obedient brown-skinned Americans, suitable for working for free or for very little pay in the white settlers' homes, farms or industries. The forms of education formerly present in Indigenous communities were dismissed and the self-sustaining systems that had been in existence for generations nearly disappeared. The ability to provide for oneself and ones' family and community was removed as the settler's monetary system replaced the needs-based and community-based work, trade, and barter systems that previously existed (Beaulieu, 1990; Caldwell et al., 2005; Child, 1998; Grinde, 2004; Lopez et al., 2013; Spring, 2012; Szasz, 1999).

Over time, the calls for more humane treatment of American Indians resulted in paternalistic governmental policies wherein the colonizers asserted themselves as protectors, claiming to know better than Indigenous communities themselves what was good for them. The images of the "noble savage" were pervasive and the perception was that their naiveté required decision-making on their behalf by the "wiser" and more "civilized" primarily white, settlers. The perspective and opinions of American Indians themselves were rarely considered. During this time period in tribal–United States Government relations treaties were terminated, removing individuals and groups from recognized tribal status, thereby reducing the number of sovereign nations with whom the government was engaged. It was not until late in the 1900's when self-determination became part of the conversation, if not in actuality of practice, in governmental policy. Even in contemporary times, the ways in which the perspectives of American Indians are given voice are more difficult in practice than on paper, including determining the goals for education for American Indians and measuring the outcomes of these goals, for

American Indians and by American Indian communities (Beaulieu, 1990; Grinde, 2004; Reyhner, 1992; Szasz, 1999). Education and schooling continue to be valued among Native nations but the role and purposes may differ among communities and in comparison with goals of non-Native schools. Arguments have been made for fully extending and implementing Indigenous sovereignty to education (Gross, 1972; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2008).

**Theoretical Framework: Epistemologies, Axiologies, Ontologies, and Pedagogies**

All societies have developed ways of operating in the world that are different from place to place, and culture to culture. These include ways of being in the world (ontology), what is valued (axiology), ways of knowing (epistemology), ways they understand the world's origins and purpose (cosmology), and pedagogy (way of teaching and learning). These frameworks need to be accounted for in analyses of education and comparison across different groups, including determining what constitutes successful educational initiatives. Contemporary education and measurement of outcomes generally do not account for these significant differences in world views and assume a universal acceptance and truth that is taught and tested based most often on Western/Euro-centered approaches.

Indigenous knowledge includes holism, a sense of place, the primacy of relationships, and maintaining a space for multiple counter-narratives. It is relevant to identify underlying issues that might represent differences between western and Indigenous learning in order to establish an open framework for appropriate goals and outcome measures of educational programs. It should be noted that at points, these differences may be represented as in binary opposition to one another, while in fact there

may be overlap and gradations of adherence to the conclusions being drawn. Indigenous philosophies often emphasize and embrace multiple epistemologies and cosmologies.

Social dissonance theory may be thought of as the mismatch between home life and social experiences. One such example is the expectations that students face when arriving at school for the first time may be different from, or contrary to, norms in the home (Huffman, 2010; Powers, 2003). The accompanying discomfort from the mismatch can be severe and social norms tend to place the responsibility for illness of fit on the individual students, their families, or culture as rather than the Western/Eurocentric norms. Critical theorists, in varying ways, have sought to examine the nature of the status quo and suggest that expanding the view of normal is a more respectful and inclusive approach (Grande, 2004; Brayboy, 2005).

Additional discussions about the nature of knowing have been undertaken in order to more deeply question the assumptions of the current school systems. McConaghy (2000) has asked what constitutes “western knowledge” and “Indigenous knowledge?”

Additionally the concept of racial incommensurability brings depth to the conversation as we examine the purpose of school and as we try to answer the question of “whose education.” Racial incommensurability as a concept can help us to understand that, between two options; it is neither true that one of them is better than the other, nor true that they are of equal value. Instead, they may not be comparable at all (Keddie, Gowlett, Mills, Monk, & Renshaw, 2013). Keeping the notion of racial incommensurability at the forefront of philosophical framing for educational systems may help create systems of Indigenous education and measurement of programs serving

Indigenous students that are unique and independent from what exists currently in terms of groundings in theory and philosophy, pedagogy and methodology.

As part of the dialogue about the purpose of education, it might be noted that in some instances Indigenous culture has been made generic and reduced to a way of life that is seen as homogenized, romanticized, and strictly historical (Keddie et al., 2013). Placing Indigenous education in a limited cultural context disempowers the living and dynamic nature of Indigenous peoples and their evolving cultures. Additionally, such a compartmentalization incorrectly creates a binary system of Western/Eurocentric versus Indigenous education.

Hohepa (2013) introduces the concept of Indigeneity as a principled and theoretical approach to educational leadership. It is suggested that education be Indigenous led and rely on reciprocal learning and leading. Additionally, education should follow Indigenous ways and beliefs and be assessed using measures established by the community. These approaches of reclamation and renewal also serve to acknowledge heterogeneity within assumed groups often assumed to be homogeneous. Kaupapa Maori reinforces that concept of "for Maori, by Maori, of Maori" in terms of Indigenous education in New Zealand (Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh, & Teddy, 2009).

**The Relationship of Indigenous Knowledge to Evaluation in Education**

Given the dynamic and rich dialogue that can help to frame the "why" of evaluation, it is recommended that exploring a community's philosophical approach to not only education, but also to life, be included as a key component of a comprehensive evaluation. In Western society, the dominant cultural viewpoint exists in the status quo with very little examination of its validity. Epistemologies that differ are compared to a

Western dominant viewpoint as if it was the uniformly accepted center and correct view and alternative views are secondary and incorrect (Dunbar, 2008). Without thoughtful examination, the purpose of education could be seen to be universally understood and accepted. However, there exist myriad reasons for education, both formal and informal. Goals of schooling in the United States have included teaching common moral and political values, work force preparation, reforming family life, equality of opportunity, and preparation for a global economy (Spring, 2012).

However, in Indigenous communities, education had always been an integrated part of tribal life. Historically, Indigenous pedagogies were experiential, based on modeling and mentorship types of teaching, passing on information necessary to sustain life, impart values and cultural beliefs, stories, and language (Demmert, 2001; Lopez et al., 2013).

By no means were the Indigenous inhabitants of North American "uneducated." The schooling that came with the missionaries and boarding school era nearly eliminated traditional Indigenous education and replaced it with a Eurocentric model, despite a chronicled experience of complex and positive social systems in existence prior to colonization that included education (Beaulieu, 1990; Harrington, 2013; Reyhner, 1992; Spring, 2012). It follows then, that assumptions should not be made about the current goals of Indigenous education in the broadest sense as these goals are community driven, varied, and worthy of exploration in individual communities.

Much has been written about recommended methods of teaching and learning with Indigenous students. Some recommendations for best practice in education of American Indian students is based on quantitative research and some is based on

qualitative measures such as anecdotal accounts, narratives, focus groups, and experiential recollection by practitioners. There are a number of unique perspectives that necessitate alternative measures of outcomes for Indigenous students. Educational philosophy suggests that there are divergent viewpoints of what, why, and how education and evaluation of education takes place.

Indigenous Knowledge (IK), according to Battiste, includes "the wealth and richness of Indigenous language, worldviews, teachings, and experiences" (2005, p. 1) and may draw on the following ways that Indigenous cultures: "1) relate to their habitat in ways that are harmonious, 2) have been conquered by a colonialist nation-state, 3) provide a perspective on human experience that differs from Western empirical science" (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2008, p. 144). The intersection of axiology, ontology, epistemology, and pedagogy form the essential dynamic of IK and are crucial to understanding the lived and educational experiences for Indigenous people (Brayboy & Maughan, 2009). Examination and application of IK, including in scientific, environmental, agricultural, and technical realms, illustrates the boundaries and limitations of Eurocentric world views in terms of "methodology, evidence and conclusions" (Battiste, 2005, p. 2) as it encompasses "what can be observed and what can be thought" (Battiste, 2005, p. 4). The acceptance and integration of IK, including that which surpasses Westernized empirical understanding and accesses the source from which knowledge, power and medicine come, into academia and policy development has made way for continuing efforts toward the decolonization of education (Battiste, 1998, 2005; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2008). Indigenous Knowledge is dynamic and contemporary while based in tradition, language and culture and represented through

"relationships, songs, ceremonies, performances, symbols, dramatic representation and works of art" (Battiste & Henderson, 2009, p. 6). The ways in which knowledge is known, produced, and identified has been essential to "cultural survival and well-being" (Brayboy & Maughan, 2009, p. 3).

In the Eurocentric educational model, holistic approaches to learning and reasoning had been removed from approaches to critical thinking and a reductionist approach to understanding has been valued, as is evidenced with the rise of preference to the Scientific Method in the Social Sciences beginning in the 1970's (Charmaz, 2014). The Scientific Method attempts to isolate parts of a problem or situation and understand it apart from its source or use. While a widely accepted approach, Scientific Method rarely accounts for the notion that systems, people, or even inanimate objects are more than simply the sum of their parts. Battiste (2005) describes the disaggregation that accompanies Scientific Method as a simplified way of knowing and labels it cognitive imperialism in that it assumes a higher level of correctness in philosophy than Indigenous Knowledge and life ways. Again referring to racial incommensurability, we are reminded of the inherent correctness of multiple viewpoints, neither right nor wrong, but each having vital and essential value, voice, influence and power (Keddie et al., 2013). As humans, the process of making meaning is complex and viewing any single situation from varying vantage points, or multilogicality, is essential in order to shape "social analysis, political perspectives, knowledge production, and action (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2008, p. 138). Other attempts have been made to reintroduce holism into academia, such as with the study of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 2006). To build on a holistic philosophical approach, consider Anuik and Gillies's (2012) description of an

educational process that creates an awareness of learning blocks and moving through systemic oppression by validating that which is human and manifests itself uniquely. Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008) and Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit) as introduced by Brayboy (2005), also emphasize analysis and critique of the existing systems, processes, and policies that exist in order to breakdown assumptions and the acceptance of uniformity in approach.

Additionally, the concept of "place" (Bang et al., 2014; Chinn, 2007; Meyer, 2008) is one expression of the concept of "we are all related." All things, animate or inanimate; past, present or future; human and non-human; are related to one another and none is ranked higher than another. The idea of place, then, could be described as "dwelling within" rather than where one resides. As conceptualization of place translates to the educational environment, it is especially important to recognize where one is located and the history held by that place that the history is inherently tied reciprocally to learning (Meyer, 2008). Stevenson (2008) expands thinking about place to include teaching and learning that is relevant to place and that being grounded in geography may help to transcend ill effects of an increasing reliance on media and technology among students. Additionally, place-based learning can provide traction for critical analysis, awareness of social justice issues and holistic approaches to understanding, among others, environment and humanities (Meyer, 2008).

Reyhner (1992) describes a tendency in Indigenous learners to be "global or holistic learners." The concept of different world view, or ways of knowing, can be taken a step further when looking at holism versus than reductionism. For many Indigenous communities, the individual is not separate from the family; the family is not separate

from the community; the community is not separate from the ancestors or from descendants, as is described by the notion of "seven generations." The same is true in education. Education is not just for a single child, but his family, her community and her ancestors and his descendants. Education is from, among, and to the world around us; teaching and learning occur between all things seen and unseen. Carr describes holism as the coherence and unity of life (1986). For teachers, holism in their practice means participating in transformative learning in their own professional development wherein they learn to compare and contrast western versus traditional Indigenous holistic ways of knowing. Making use of critical pedagogical practice will help them to be cognizant of making space in the learning environment for Indigenous students with divergent world views (Chinn, 2007).

Along these same lines, involving community, especially elders, is essential to creating goals and ultimately measuring outcomes in education. Elder involvement is a cornerstone of Indigenous philosophy of education and drives pedagogy that also includes the use of oral traditions and expression, practical learning through observing and experience, intergenerational teachings about social and human experience, engagement with the interrelationships with environment and is fully holistic. It also assumes that the individuals come with knowledge and education is the process of revealing, expanding and accessing that knowledge (Friere, 2009; Jeffries & Singer, 2003; McGregor, 2013). Thinking is done through reflection, seeing, and doing, as opposed to being told. A cooperative environment is preferred. Friere postulates that we, as humans, do not think alone, a concept which is underscored when paired with an identified strength of Indigenous students who tend to learn best in relationship (Friere,

2009; Reyhner, 1992). “Socially situated learning recognizes that values, emotions, experiences, and cultural contexts are integrally related to learning” (Chinn, 2007, p. 1250). The complexity of relationally based learning has often been dismissed by the mainstream educational system (Chinn, 2007). Native American students’ worldview places them in the context of interdependent relationships with others primary to being independent, as with their European American counterparts (Fryberg, Covarrubias, & Burack, 2013).

A traditional Indigenous method of learning that is connected to sense of place, holism, and relationships is narrative inquiry. Barton (2004) provides a template for connecting narrative inquiry as a teaching methodology to these identified ways of knowing. Three dimensions of narrative inquiry are interaction, which is the personal and social components of inquiry; continuity – the past, present and future; and situation, which is the consideration of place. Using the study of epiphanies, rituals, routines, metaphors and every day experiences offers a way of understanding experiences and provides guidance for integrating new information into existing knowledge. From the process of examining these combinations, something new can emerge for the learner. Such an examination of narrative, or critical storytelling, is not new to Indigenous teaching and learning. Storytelling has been a traditional method of making and revealing meaning while sharing history, values, and information. The concept of counter-narrative and storytelling is essential to educational evaluation reform as the current limited measures of educational outcomes are not frequently aligned with Indigenous worldviews (Barton, 2004).

## Potential Directions in Indigenous Education

The literature provides some insight into potential themes in contemporary Indigenous Education done in ways that are more responsive to the needs of the communities. The conversations with community stakeholders have directed further review of the literature and corresponding additions are noted in the Findings section.

## Culture and Language

Best practices in Indigenous education indicate an approach to curriculum and programming that has an authentic respect for culture and language. While these cultural components will vary greatly by tribe or nation, some examples of key cultural concepts might include developing respect for Mother Earth and having elders present in the schools and as advisors. The strong integrated presence of Indigenous language and culture in a secondary educational program, as defined by the community, is necessary to combat the effects of historical and educational trauma and should be included in its evaluation.

Teaching culture involves teaching history in a deliberate manner including holistic connections between social and environmental elements (McGregor, 2013).

## Community and Family Investment

Best practice in Indigenous education involves families and communities in education and not only assures Indigenous control of Indigenous education, but also provides a venue for healing historical and intergenerational trauma. Community and family investment may also help to return traditional Indigenous ways of interaction and learning through demonstration, modeling and learning from elders using culturally specific approaches while maintaining autonomy and self-direction for the future.

Beaulieu (1990) calls for more Indigenous community involvement in public education. The "Red Book," a set of recommendations submitted to the White House by Indigenous leaders (National Indian Education Association, 1997), requested governmental transfer of control to Indigenous tribes that requested it. The six specific ways for transferring control and how tribes could expect to be supported was documented in President Clinton's executive order of 1998 (American Indian and Alaska Native Education, 1998). Michael Gross makes a strong legal case for Indigenous control of Indian Education (1972). Not only have academic, legal and political leaders made the case for Indigenous educational guidance, but also the pedagogical response to historical and intergenerational trauma requires it. For students to no longer feel that they have to choose between being successful academically and being Indigenous goes a long way to begin to heal the cultural and personal identity rift, particularly when families and community members are actively engaged in education. To that end, involving families and communities is essential for self-determination. Family involvement is important because parents do want their students to be successful but may be unsure how to help them. By being active participants, families can help guide education as well as understand what the goals of their children's school are for the students (Grant & Gillespie, 1993). Establishing a deliberate set of outreach strategies to communicate with families and engage them early and frequently in the planning process is crucial, as is including them in actual class work, where they can support their students and share their own expertise (Rogers & Jaime, 2010). What is more, rather than just the involvement of community, following the lead of the community in what is desired across all aspects of educating Indigenous children is ideal.

It is crucial that the school, administrators, and staff create a flexible system that allows for Indigenous ways of being, learning, and knowing in consultation with community partners, families, and students. Such community involvement and flexibility to Indigenous ways of knowing is a different approach to much of what has been done is public school systems working with Indigenous students, where they are usually asked to conform to the existing European/Western-based structure of the school. Community and family involvement or direction will be a crucial aspect to evaluate as well as to help guide the evaluation design, including determining measures.

**Systemic and Administrative Support**

The leadership of a program, school, or district is crucial in the success of the program and for students. Leadership traits that tend to be connected with positive outcomes for Indigenous students in schools include the willingness to rewrite the dominant narrative (discursive repositioning), strategic goal setting, distributed leadership with a common vision of excellence, embracing of culturally responsive pedagogies, school ownership of problems, inclusion of Indigenous community, and effective use of evidence of student performance (Bishop, Berryman, Wearmouth, et al., 2012). In addition, the belief on the part of leadership that learning is dialogic, spiral, and interactive is a positive attribute (Bishop, Berryman, Wearmouth, et al., 2012; Barton, 2004).

In addition to having an exemplary leader and/or distributed leadership, the size of the school, its school format and its model of governance all appear to have an impact on the success of the school and its students (Bishop, Berryman, Wearmouth, et al., 2012; Jeffries & Singer, 2003). A case study examined alternative schools versus Eurocentric

educational experiences. They found that alternative schools may be able to be more flexible, provide options for more independent work and responsibility, remove of some peer pressures, and address economic considerations. In addition, students are able to focus on shorter term outcomes, which allow them to meet social development, self-actualization, and self-esteem goals better (Jeffries & Singer, 2003).

Gray and Beresford (2008) argue that factors affecting the success of Indigenous students and educational systems need to be examined in conjunction with one another not in isolation. Such factors include the traumatic social, political, and educational history of American Indian students, as well as examining the current systemic deficit models of education, and rooting out contemporary impacts of overt and covert governmental influence in Indigenous affairs.

**Teacher Development**

One of the most frequently cited factors in the positive outcomes for Indigenous students is the quality and commitment of the teachers. Evaluating a secondary Indigenous education program then would need to examine ways in which the program defines, attracts, develops, and retains quality staff. Chinn (2007) calls for transformative learning for teachers, where the staff is taught to compare and contrast western versus traditional Indigenous holistic ways of knowing in order to raise awareness and support culturally competent teaching practices. Citing Wearmouth et al. and Marsden, Habib, Densmore-James, and Macfarlane (Habib, Densmore-James, & Macfarlane, 2013) describe understanding these differences as “perceptions of what is apparent and achievable is based on what they [communities, in this case, Indigenous communities] perceive reality to be; patterned on time-honored experiences, belief systems, ways of

thinking, feeling, and behaving; they extend from the past and are inherent in logic, narratives and beliefs that form worldview" (2013, p. 3).

M. Donaldson (2012) calls for effective relationships and collaboration between teachers and students and families. Teachers must accept professional responsibility. In New Zealand, Bishop, Berryman, Wearmouth, and Peter (2012), working in kaupapa kura Maori, schools for Maori, of Maori, by Maori, have identified a model of teacher development seen as essential for working with Indigenous students. Self-directed autonomous learning becomes the responsibility of the teacher, with significantly positive results. Bishop's Effective Teaching Profile (Bishop, Berryman, Wearmouth, et al., 2012) rejects deficit models and helps teachers to become agentic in their own development.

Additionally, Indigenous teachers could potentially provide ideal role models for Indigenous students. Currently, however, there is a shortage of Indigenous teachers and some of those who have gone through teacher education programs have struggled greatly to maintain their Indigenous culture and perspective within the Eurocentric educational system (Beaulieu & Figuera, 2006). Meanwhile, it is imperative to ensure that all teachers, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, working with Indigenous students have a thorough understanding of issues and working with Indigenous students and a willingness to learn community ways. Professional development, therefore, is key.

**Pedagogical Considerations**

Assessing to what degree teaching and learning is reciprocal, co-constructed, cooperative, and culturally appropriate (M. Donaldson, 2012) may be an essential part of the overall program evaluation. Other considerations would include use of flexible formats, arts-based, integrative, whole-brained learning (Curtis, Townsend, & Airini,

2012). Culturally appropriate assessments would include use of multiple formats including narrative, formative, non-competitive, interviews, oral, listening, self, peer, etc. Bang et al. (2014) underscore the importance of place-based learning. Learning style research indicates that many Indigenous students are reflective versus impulsive learners (Pewewardy, 2002) but the impact that these pedagogical approaches have are more difficult to determine. Assie-Lumumba (2012) describes the influence of personal ideology on a teacher's pedagogical approach. In a Eurocentric/Westernized world, the colonial influences weigh heavily on the individual teachers and the system as a whole. It takes a concentrated effort to take broader strokes in the approach to teaching. Curtis, Townsend, and Airini (2012) encourage the use of effective practices for teaching and learning that are strength-based. Approaches include a holistic approach that supports students in both affective and academic domains and the encouragement of independent empowered learners. Use of a cohort to emphasize the cultural aspects of relationship-based learning with positive peers can also lend positive results.

**Curriculum**

Best practice calls for interdisciplinary, experiential, community-based, applied-knowledge learning projects (Reyhner & Eder, 1989). Materials used in courses should be culturally appropriate while integrating Indigenous history and reading Indigenous authors. Teachers need to be savvy enough to watch for omissions in the materials they place in front of student in order to engage and not alienate students (Grant & Gillespie, 1993).

In traditional Indigenous cultural ways of knowing, cause and effect are not necessarily linear and do not operate in Eurocentric corollaries. Instead, the

interconnectedness of all things is understood through language and cultural practices. Rather than categorize items according to western Scientific Method, for example, the traditional way might connect things by relationship, by family or community, or by how something is used. The "social, economic, spiritual, and historical" aspects of learning have the most significance. To that end, courses should be interdisciplinary, including culturally and linguistically integrated (McGregor, 2013; Powers, 2003). Evaluation should, then, address the degree to which the curriculum and its design are reflective of the culture and expectations of the community.

**Evaluation and Outcome Measures**

Evaluation as a way of measuring a program or intervention as a whole, and as a profession, has a relatively recent presence, particularly in education (S. I. Donaldson & Lipsey, 2006). With the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESAE) in 1965, the federal government required recipients of federal funds to evaluate the outcomes reached from use of these funds (Fitzpatrick, Sanders, & Worthen, 2011; Linn, 2005). More recently, United States Federal government efforts such as No Child Left Behind, Race to the Top and myriad state-level programs that require measures of school successes have garnered much popular attention. The required measures for these initiatives are not in-depth, long-term, goal-oriented evaluations, but rather are measurements of yearly objectives that are usually established by governmental entities (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011; Mackey, 2012). Even in locations where the community need is unique and opportunities for authentic learning are evident, educators have tended to narrowly focus on mainstream content in order to achieve higher for the national standardized tests (Chinn, 2007).

Regarding teacher accountability, the desired inputs and outcomes are arguable. Cruickshank & Haefele (2001) reviewed the historical perceptions of what the characteristics of "good" teachers had been since the early 1900's. The identified variations included: ideal, analytic, effective, dutiful, competent, expert, reflective, satisfying, diversity-responsive, and respected, all with different axiological perspectives dependent on the social circumstances of the time. Recommendations have been made to streamline measurement of teacher effectiveness, however, these measures which are heavily subjective, are left to individual states, districts, or schools to develop (Gordon, Kane, & Staiger, 2006). Teacher evaluations are targeted only at a specified set of teacher skills on an individual basis and are most often offered as input for teacher improvement (Hull, 2013).

There is, however, some evidence of movement toward more comprehensive evaluation, at least in discussion and theory. For example, the document *21st Century Education Accountability: Recommendations for a New Federal Framework* (Consortium, 2014) drafted by the Large Countrywide and Suburban District Consortium, provides guidance to national educational policy and includes a number of broad strokes in recommendations for educational evaluation. The American Evaluation Association (AEA) has expressed concerns about the benefit relative to harm of high stakes testing and that the scores may not accurately reflect student learning (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011). The usability of these assessments, even those aligned with standards, is not a foregone conclusion. The validity, generalizability, and conclusions based on causal factors are not well addressed (Linn, 2005).

Beyond teacher evaluation and standardized testing, evaluation of secondary educational co- or intra-curricular programs is virtually non-existent. Setting aside the question of validity of measurements of these broad goals and even the more essential questions of philosophy of education and the purpose of education, the complexity of measurement has become simplified to the point where a given narrow measure, such as a test score, has essentially become the outcome. In addition to standardized testing and teacher evaluation initiatives, efforts thus far in evaluation have identified a number of key strategies that have been found among successful educational programs including 1) children are valued, 2) additional support services are available, and 3) relationships between the school, the family, and the community exist in ways that are not found in mainstream schools (Cardenas, 1996). Politicians and the media spotlight data points that make headlines and an under-informed public has little basis for comparison or reasonable critical analysis. While it might be assumed that the policy makers have the best interests of the public at heart, the practicalities of the application of data can result in special interest groups receiving favor (Lubienski, Scott, & Debray, 2014). Henig (2012) advocates for the politicization of use and application of high-quality data in educational systems. The power of politics could be used to effect systemic change in much the same way that politics in the past have sustained the status quo.

Previous research provides some potential directions in evaluation for secondary educational programs. McKinley et al. (in Habib et al., 2013) cite pedagogy, policy, assessment, educator knowledge, and community involvement as key to culturally relevant education. Keith and Cool (1992) called for attention to be paid to direct and indirect effects on school learning. In his meta-analysis, he examined ability, quality of

instruction, motivation, and academic instructional time across family background, gender and ethnic groups. A case study of an urban alternative high school isolated school size, flexible school formats, governance structures, and culturally responsive teachers as key to the success of Indigenous students (Jeffries & Singer, 2003).

Suggestions for improving academic outcomes for Indigenous students include schools that are more flexible, with less emphasis on attendance and a higher use of criterion-based outcomes. Schools that seek to empower students and communities use a theory-practice model. Schools that value family and community involvement may have better educational outcomes for students. Also recommended is use of an integrative, whole-brained, cooperative learning environment and having dedicated, culturally responsive teachers, an exemplary leader, and having a small school size (Angus & Hanson, 2011; Borman, Hewes, Overman, & Brown, 2003; Castagano & Brayboy, 2008; Jeffries & Singer, 2003). Unique approaches to Indigenous education require comprehensive evaluation that measures effectiveness of the program to determine which approaches have been successful. Measuring effectiveness in educational programs, however, should not be limited to input variables, but should also address and describe what has been learned or understood using the values and ways of knowing of those involved (American Indian Higher Education Consortium, 2009).

**Evaluation Framework: Educational Evaluation, Indigenous Evaluation, and Indigenous Educational Evaluation**

While education contemporarily has emphasizes outcomes such as standardized test scores, high school graduation rates, college matriculation rates, etc., the efficacy of educational institutions is rarely evaluated comprehensively. What is more, the measures

used are generally not developed by the communities being served, but rather are provided by state or federal mandates. Evaluation within Indigenous communities has also a limited scope. There are, however, approaches recommended to be followed when conducting evaluation within Indigenous communities. Given the limitations of the evaluation in education and the evaluation in Indigenous communities, it is not surprising that there is not an abundance of current literature on evaluating education within indigenous communities.

**Educational Evaluation**

Evaluation is defined as "a systematic method of determining the merit, worth, or value of a program, policy, activity, technology, or similar entity to inform decision making about such entities" (Mertens, 2009, p. 1). Comprehensive, holistic educational evaluation in K-12 schools, when it exists at all, tends to be limited to an accreditation process that often may not include a broad spectrum of stakeholders, yet the underlying philosophy and goals of the evaluation are assumed to be universally understood. Various agencies have been established with a charge to approve or accredit a school or district based on established guidelines. One such agency, AdvancEd, outlines their evaluation model through standards and indicators. The identified standards are: 1) purpose and direction, 2) governance and leadership, 3) teaching and assessing for learning, 4) resources and support systems, and 5) using results for continuous improvement (AdvancEd, 2011). While such an evaluative approach begins to broaden the scope of measuring schools beyond student assessment and teacher evaluation, it does so from a westernized, Eurocentric perspective that does not necessarily include the community voice.

**Indigenous Evaluation**

Diversity and Indigenous perspective in evaluation have been expressly addressed in academia. “There are those who argue that evaluation is free of bias and measurement is only done against objective outcomes,” says Alkin (2013). We are reminded, however, that every person has a perspective that can and will skew the way one views the world. In order to be more responsive to the needs of specific populations, contextually appropriate practices for evaluation and research must be followed (Dunbar, 2008). For those working with American Indian populations, the American Indian Research and Program Evaluation Methodology work group symposium has provided direction that includes requiring research or evaluation with American Indian communities to establish and maintain a relationship-based, authentic partnership with the communities. Attention should be paid to the cultural context of each community, while emphasizing the community strengths and adhering to ethical practices. The research should aim to actively build capacity within an individual community, with data management, oversight and review held with the community (Caldwell et al., 2005).

Cavino (2013) affirms community-based evaluation and goes further in examining the role of evaluating across cultures, including Indigenous peoples, in New Zealand. She draws attention to the power differential that occurs due to privilege and suggests that Indigenous people may be, at a minimum, resistant to evaluation from non-Indigenous researchers. Evaluators, from the Indigenous (Maori) cultural lens, should be more than culturally competent; they should be protectors and spiritual nurturers. The evaluation should also be contextualized historically, politically, socially, and economically. Partnership, participation, and protection are themes that should guide

non-Indigenous and Indigenous evaluations. These factors and others lead to the need for contextually accepted research methods that yield to alternatives that are responsive to the community. The community maintains its right to define and value itself and elements concerning its people while simultaneously deconstructing the mainstream assumptions (Cram, 2004). The interplay between cultures necessitates that both the evaluator and individual or community represent a culture. Therefore, in order to examine another, we must first examine our own (Chouinard & Cousins, 2009). “Knowledge is not power; rather being able to define what is acceptable knowledge is power” (Cram, 2004, p. 9). Brayboy makes the point that stories are theories and are “roadmaps for our communities” (2005) of Indigenous peoples. These stories help academics and practitioners to find ways to cross the lines where alternative ways of viewing the world and making meaning may appear different for Indigenous people compared to the mainstream.

In qualitative research, the use of narrative in evaluation helps people to make sense of the world. It allows a group to define their collective experience with a given phenomenon or to personalize an individual perspective. Perhaps most importantly, it allows the storyteller to maintain their own sense of identity (Gibbs, 2007). A participant-as-expert, community-based evaluation methodology positions narrative as a key component of an Indigenous evaluation cycle, allowing the necessary depth to understanding the perspective of the participants (Morelli & Mataira, 2010).

Demmert et al. (2006) share four broad questions that have been suggested as guides for researchers in Indigenous education: 1) What are the necessary skills that a student must master in order to have opportunities that can lead to a successful, satisfying

life? 2) What must a student learn in order to make a contribution to his or her local community as well to society at large? 3) What are the priorities of the student's family and community? 4) What are the relative responsibilities of the school, the local community, and society at large, to the development of an individual's intellectual abilities?

The American Evaluation Association (AEA), in its statement on culturally competent evaluation, reminds practitioners that "all evaluation reflects culturally influenced norms, values, and ways of knowing – making cultural competence integral to ethical, high-quality evaluation" (American Evaluation Association, 2011, p. 1). Additionally, it states that "evaluations cannot be culture free" (p. 2) and "theories are not value-neutral" (p. 6). Implication for evaluation include the use of unique approaches for evaluation of programs for Indigenous populations is necessary and, yet, is not commonplace. Approaches include using Indigenous ways of knowing, holism, Indigenous Knowledge (IK) & lifelong learning. Holism includes mentally, physically, spiritually, and emotionally engaging students, co-construction of knowledge, questioning validity of knowledge and expertise, proficiency of the brain and pedagogy of the heart (Anderson et al, 2012; Meyer, 1998).

Wilson describes research as having paradigms including unique ontologies, axiologies, epistemologies, and methodologies. He offers concern regarding the inability of researchers to "remove the tools [of research] from their underlying belief[s]" (2008, p. 13). In both Indigenous research methodology and in grounded theory, attempting to separate oneself from the research, data, or analysis is not only impossible but is also not desirable (Charmaz, 2014; Wilson, 2008). Axiologies may be of utmost importance, as

they form the framework for understanding the work being done and the intended outcomes. Inclusion of spiritual and emotional perspectives can also help expand the ways of knowing included in evaluation, shifting toward omni-dimensional review (Stevenson, 2008).

Caldwell et al. (2002) recommend participatory evaluation along with 20 guiding principles for evaluations done in Indigenous communities. Essential to these recommendations is that the research be conducted in collaboration with the communities in a culturally competent way. Recognizing and respecting tribal sovereignty and self-direction is critical in moving away from paternalistic approaches which reflect mainstream values and philosophy. Measures may or may not measure the actual program outcomes but do not necessarily indicate the program is not successful in a more broad and cultural context (Mackey, 2012).

Maori researchers describe their approach to evaluation as "[plan] the first steps tightly, then [hold] the plans loosely" (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 570). The journey, or process, of evaluation is as crucial as any other part of the evaluation and is key for learning and building relationships. The journey is made collectively with negotiated goals and all parties working together to achieve the goal, making space for like-minded others to join in the journey. Self-determination, or kaupapa Maori – "for Maori, by Maori – of Maori" is key to a culturally appropriate evaluation process (Anderson et al., 2012; Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh, et al., 2009). Additionally, summarized from the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (2009), guiding principles for Indigenous evaluation should include: 1) assessing merit or worth based on traditional values or cultural expression, 2) accesses broadly held beliefs while accommodating local

traditions or cultures, 3) adapts evaluation methodology to meet the needs of the community, 4) ownership of the evaluation process is held within the community, 5) self-determination and sovereignty are evident in the evaluation process, and 6) evaluation is an opportunity to continue to grow based on existing strengths.

When conducting evaluation or assessments in Indigenous communities, close attention needs to be paid to community-based goals and measures, a cyclical review process, and developing and maintaining relationships. These community based measurements might be more appropriate when guided by the community itself. One might consider an ideal methodology similar to a hermeneutic circle, wherein the components and the whole cannot be understood unless in relationship to each other. Similar to the aboriginal sacred circle, the entire approach to program evaluation and even assessment may not be as much methodological or outcome-based as much as it is process-oriented and open to possibilities and requires flexibility (Barton, 2004). The American Indian Higher Education Consortium (2009) and Morelli and Mataira (2012) have addressed the unique circumstances in designing and conducting evaluation in Indigenous communities.

While not exclusive to educational evaluation, several key concepts should inform evaluation with programs serving Indigenous students. These include involving community as partners in all aspects of the evaluation, recognizing that relationships are primary to the evaluation process, conducting evaluation on what the community wants, not what the "system" wants, ensuring that the results of the evaluation must benefit the community and not be just for the sake of gathering information (the concept of reciprocity), creation of frequent feedback loops, having the recognition that even within

Indigenous communities, differences exist and are to be embraced, and enlisting culturally competent (Indigenous when possible or practical) evaluators or researchers. Indigenous knowledge should be embraced and used a foundation of holistic understanding (Anuik & Gillies, 2012).

Evaluation and assessment have tended to favor quantitative analysis. To supplement or supplant quantitative data, evaluation should include qualitative approaches that are likely to capture the nuances of community, family, and cultural values such as narrative, reflections, and relational perspectives. Story or narrative in evaluation can be characterized as "events, characters, and settings arranged in a temporal sequence implying both causality and consequence" (Carter in Barton, 2004, p6). Narrative inquiry is the study of epiphanies, rituals, routines, metaphors and every day experiences and offers a rich and deep way of understanding experiences. A focus on process is essential to evaluation that is responsible to Indigenous communities (Barton, 2004).

**Evaluating Education with Indigenous Communities**

Merging the concepts of evaluation, educational evaluation, and indigenous evaluation, evaluators and educators can begin to frame Indigenous educational evaluation. Conceptually, as outlined above, there are issues of institutional racism, normalized expectations, varying ontology, etc. that must all be considered open for discussion to make way for authentic and honest informing.

Building on the foundations of evaluation that are unique to Indigenous communities and individuals, specific approaches must also be used when evaluating Indigenous students and programs within the educational system. Often the labels of

testing, assessing, and evaluation are used interchangeably. The focus of this work is on evaluation of programs serving Indigenous students. However, it is worth consideration of lessons learned from testing and assessing Indigenous students as well when crafting appropriate evaluation plans for programs serving Indigenous students.

Sandy Grande (2008) provides some direction for scholarly decolonizing work in education that serves Indigenous students by developing community-based approaches that move toward a "responsible political, economic, and spiritual society" (250). Arguments have been made for educational evaluation for Indigenous students that is responsive to the multiple factors at play within any individual or community's context. These interactive domains include factors specific to the student, those related to family and/or clan, the institutional environments such as schools, influence of community environments, and the interplay of cultural context (Morris, Paw, Arrington, & Sevcik, 2006). Additionally, Demmert (cited in Morris et al., 2006) has suggested when assessing Indigenous students that attention be given to: 1) home language and vocabulary of the student, 2) context and perspective from which questions are asked of a student, 3) the compatibility of background knowledge of the student compared to those required of the question being asked, and 4) the assessor providing a safe and comfortable environment for the student.

Dance, Gutiérrez, and Hermes state that the relationships between researcher and participants needs to be "dynamic, complex, symmetrical, and reciprocal" (2010, p. 328). In Dance et al., Hermes speaks of fluidity and reciprocity research among Native American communities, "I fully expect my research questions will be reframed as they are co-constructed anew by each community" (2010, p. 337).

While challenging, perhaps particularly for non-Indigenous staff, a direct and honest assessment of institutional racism in the school setting through conversations with families, community, and students is proposed as a method of holding oneself, as the educator, accountable in addition to facilitating a team approach to breaking through any limitations that may be present as a result of working within the existing Western / Eurocentric system. In order to prepare them for conversations replete with racial and cultural discomfort, significant professional development must be done with staff including providing them the tools for self-assessment of the "dysconscious racism" (King in Pewewardy, 2002, p. 23) that may be present due to the unconscious adherence to colonized norms and values in society. Working in conjunction with the community, the evaluation team would need to consider the aspects of teacher development that are most meaningful for their program.

Of paramount importance to Indigenous education programs is the approach taken to assessment and accountability. Assumptions are often made about what measures of student success are adequate and reasonable indicators of achievement or growth. While the standard Western models of achievement (standardized test scores, graduation rates, grade point averages, college matriculation, etc.) may be of interest to the communities being served, they should not be assumed to be the only way to assess student growth (Morelli & Mataira, 2010). Indeed, the individual student growth may not be preferred compared to the benefit brought to the community through the educational program as a whole. In some cases, the preferred student measures may include the degree to which the individual supports his or her family or has grown to reflect community values. In New

Zealand, approaches to evaluation in Indigenous communities are based on Maori world view (Anderson et al., 2012).

Approaching these complex and interrelated issues will require an approach that is guided by the community, leads the researcher in both expected and unexpected ways, co-informs the research design and process, and through which understanding is co-constructed: grounded theory (GT).

**Evaluation Theory**

Charmaz (2014) argues that use of theory is key to understanding how meaning is made and applied. Providing definition, Thornberg and Charmaz (in Charmaz, 2014) share "a theory states relationships between abstract concepts and may aim for either explanation or understanding" (p. 228).

Evaluation theories are generally divided into prescriptive or descriptive models. Most evaluation falls in the category of prescriptive, which provides direction to what a good evaluation should be. Descriptive evaluation uses information to explain or predict activities, which perhaps could be used to prescribe future evaluation of the phenomenon or program (Alkin, 2013, p. 4). Inherent in evaluation theory is the concept of accountability. Goals, process, and outcome accountability tend to be used by theorists in prescriptive models as a way to judge – evaluate – a program, for example. Goal accountability is related to the goals set by the governing institution whereas process relates to the ways in which the program is implemented. Outcome accountability is currently where education evaluation is aligned; reviewing stated expected outcomes against prescriptive measures (Alkin, 2013, p. 14). Epistemological considerations are inherent in thoughtful evaluation. Of several branches related to evaluation theory,

relativism lends the view that there is no way of evaluating without subjectivity based on the perception of the participants. Constructivism goes even further to state that knowledge gained through the evaluation is co-created with the participants and the evaluator (Alkin, 2013, p. 17).

**Grounded Theory and Phenomenology**

Grounded theory seeks to understand the epistemological basis for phenomena, exploring answers to questions of "why" things exist (Charmaz, 2014) whereas phenomenology refers to an investigative approach allows for the participants to describe fully, from their subjective perspective, their experiences of a lived phenomenon. Additionally, it provides an opportunity for the participants to assign or describe meaning of the event or circumstances (Mertens, 2010).

Moving away from current approaches in educational evaluation toward the future of educational evaluation may include merging of cricital race theory (CRT), TribalCrit, and Community-based Research Methodolgy (CBRM). Movement toward an emerging theory of Indigenous Eduational Evaluation, may render it appropriate to use a grounded theory approach to evaluation and may provide tools to make evaluation more reflective of the communities being served. Grounded theory is an approach to understanding a phenomenon through cyclical "systematic, yet flexible guidelines" (p. 1) for collecting and using data without a preformed hypothesis (Charmaz, 2014). This research methodology is designed to generate a way of understanding a phenomenon through creation of theory based on empirical data related to human understanding of, and interaction with, the phenomenon. Field work, including data collection, drives the theoretical explanation for the phenomenon with data analysis from the very beginning.

The emerging categories from the data drive future data collection and new data is compared against the original data. Often, narrative descriptions of the results provide a way of explaining the concepts (Urquhart, 2000). Symbolic interactionism and social constructivism are at the heart of interpretive approaches to grounded theory, offering an ideal way to ensure that multiple realities are respected (Charmaz, 2014), including those of Indigenous communities, when examining perceptions and expectations of secondary educational programming. These interpretive approaches describe the phenomenon of circumstances and human beings affecting each other reciprocally based on perception. An action is perceived a particular way due to the experiences of the perceiver and the actions humans take are influenced by how we perceive the situation. Situations are then constructed socially and are potentially composed of multiple ways of viewing the world (Charmaz, 2014).

Most studies on Indigenous education have tended to focus on quantitative outcome data, looking at the successes and failures of Native American students based on typically accepted measures such as high school graduation and dropout rates, college matriculation rates, and standardized test scores. By using a grounded theory approach, this study proposes to question the very nature of the measures and instead allow the community to share information that will help formulate not only the answers but also the most appropriate questions for examining educational goals and successes. From these rich conversations, qualitative data will be collected and feedback loops followed to gain insight as to what is significant in relationship to education and provide base level theory for future study. Compared to Scientific Methodology using control and experimental

group design, grounded theory is more responsive to the calls for critiquing the status quo and for analyzing assumptions, as per CRT and TribalCrit.

Using the experiences of the partner participants and by disclosing and grounding my own experience in our relationships and conversations, the information collected has guided the construction a theory of purpose and successes of education for Native American high school students in a particular urban American Indian educational community. Data collected has been compared with the literature and analyzed for themes, comparing with historical, contemporary and unique perspectives on education presented by the participants and other data sources. Theory attempts to answer the "why" of phenomena through examining the relationship between "what" and "how" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 228). Without participation of those who more fully understand the context and situation, there cannot be a true interpretation of the items being studied. Grounded theory is a form of interpretive theory where rather than seek causality, looks for patterns and connections (Charmaz, 2014, p. 230). It is a form of relationship between the researcher, the participants, the historical context, individual and collective experiences, the current situation, social expectations, etc., wherein these and other variables and time bound circumstances affect perspectives in interpreting data and co-creating meaning from it. Factors of social constructivism in grounded theory that are certainly to be worthy of consideration in this study include concepts of power, race, history (boarding schools, education, and evaluation, as examples), governmental role and relationships, social economic status, culture, language, philosophy, and ideas on best practice in Indigenous education.

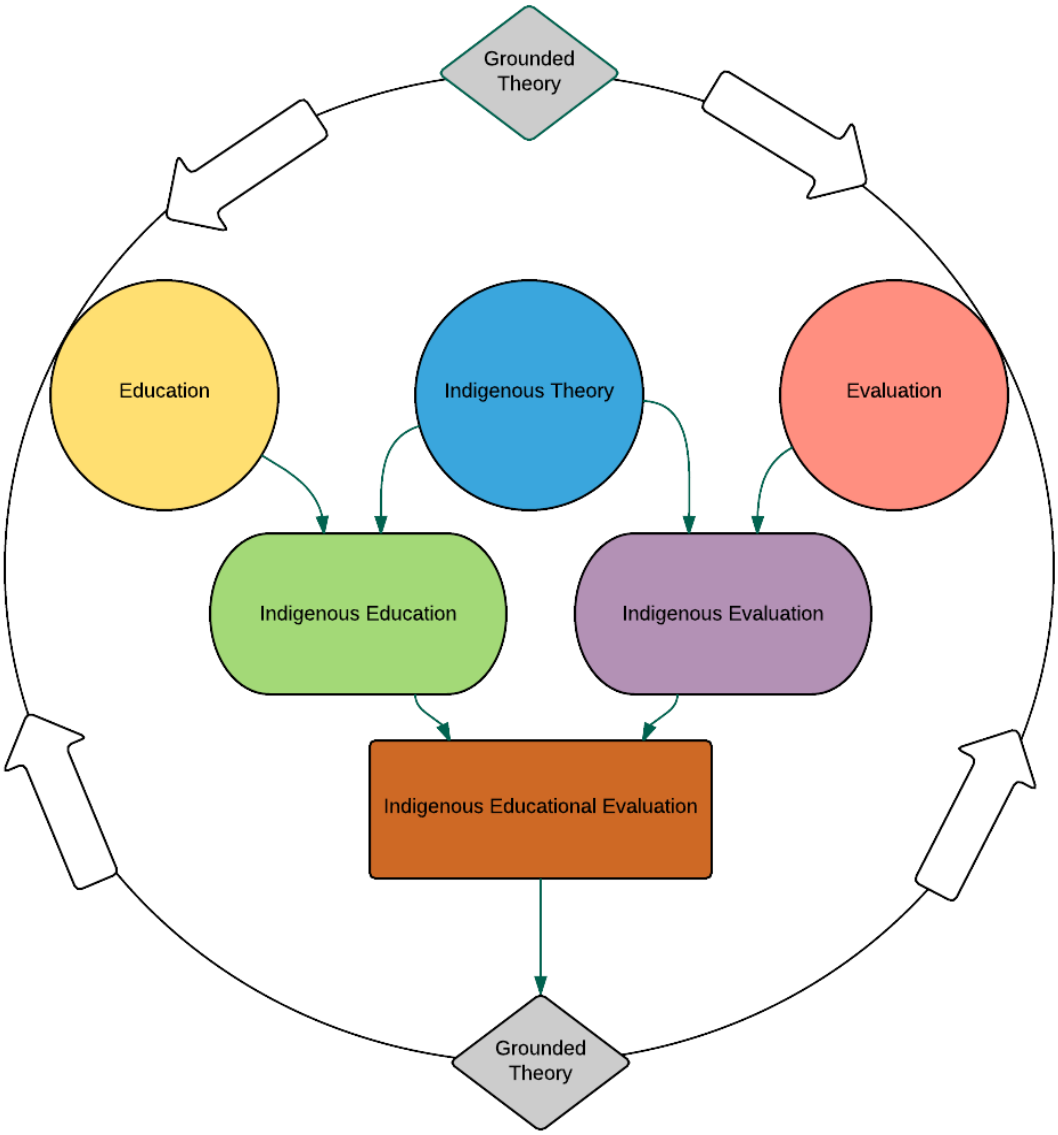


*Figure A.* The integration of theories of education, Indigenous Knowledge, and evaluation could provide a framework for evaluating Indigenous education more responsively to the needs of the American Indian communities.

**Evaluator Role**

Various theories provide guidance to the role of the evaluator. As an evaluator, one collects, observes, analyzes, and interprets data in order to inform the merit or worth of a program, intervention, etc., (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011). Acknowledging the role of a participant observer means that what has been observed, witnessed, analyzed, etc. can only be understood and communicated to others to the closest degree possible but never entirely accurately as the circumstances being reported on were in the past and in another context. A participant observer approach means that the greatest care must be taken to acknowledge one's own perspective and limitations when relating what is being evaluated (Behar, 1996).

The levels of involvement can be described in terms of objectivity/subjectivity, value-free to value-laden, and removed observer to full participant. There are those who advocate for goal-free and others who say that it is not possible to remove values or individual perspectives from evaluation (Alkin, 2013; Scriven, 2014).

Additionally, research including evaluation requires one to state his or her own place, that is, the stance from where he or she comes. This statement of identity could include: the place of origin, prior experiences, and ways of relating to the world and to others, etc. (Anuik & Gillies, 2012). A strong sense of self-awareness and reflection is required (Behar, 1996). To that end, it is appropriate for the author to contextualize experiences and situate this work:

*Despite having grown up in poverty and significant challenges in other aspects of my family life in my early years, I have privilege. I am white, European American. My English-born mother provided me with the benefits of early informal and formal*

*education so I began school ready to succeed in the school system as it exists in the United States. My ability to navigate the current educational system is tied to my cultural experiences; the American educational system was built by those similar to me, for those similar to me. Assumptions have been and continue to be made that emphasize the primacy of the Western/Eurocentric ways of understanding the world. I can trace my ancestry to Finland on my father's side of the family, and, through England and Scotland, to Belgium on my mother's side. I have a remote sense of kinship to these unknown people and parts of the world. My curiosity is great to know what similarities I might have to those who came before. My deepest connections, however, are to the remote forested place where I grew up in Northern Wisconsin, near the shore of Lake Superior. I learned from the changing seasons, messages from the land itself, ways of surviving through living in harmony with what nature provided. Despite living in an overwhelming homogenous community, I grew up side by side with my Native American best friend and her family and that closeness has undoubtedly affected my development and worldview. I now live largely in discontinuity with the ways in which I was raised, not entirely unlike many of the urban American Indian high school students with whom I have worked for the past more than 12 years. There are, however, many distinct differences, primarily that I have not had to question my identity or challenge my worldview except by choice. I have not felt the need to relegate family, community, and cultural belief systems to the background in order to conform to the existing system in order to be "successful" within it.*

*As much as I am able to, given the limitations of my experience, I know the strength of Native Americans in the mid-west, having spent my entire life here, growing*

*up together, learning each other's communication shorthand, preferences, humor, world view and developing an acceptance of who the other is at the core. I know the passion, commitment, heart, knowledge and intellect that most Native Americans I have met bring to their chosen pursuits. I also know that social, political and educational change is coming and it does not need me. I know my voice is sometimes not welcomed as Indigenous voices are rightly preferred in this work. I had not sought out working with American Indian students; I do not think I chose this work as much as it chose me. I also know that it would be easier for me to choose another arena in which to work and that at times, quite frankly, has had its appeal. I would be able avoid the discomfort of being the only white person in the room, of feeling responsible for generations of maltreatment on the part of European invaders and the US government, of looking to find ways to be authentically me and still fit in and not offend. Would not every marginalized individual in the world love the option to walk out of that discomfort? My privilege allows me that "out" anytime I want to take it and the fact that my Indigenous brothers and sisters cannot is another reason for me not to opt out. Even though I fell into this work, I now choose to be an ally and to follow through on the commitment that we humans have to one another. As a part of advocating for allies worldwide, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, to deconstruct neocolonialism systems that currently cause harm, Kincheloe and Steinberg have said, "helping to construct conditions that allow for Indigenous self-sufficiency while learning from the vast storehouse of Indigenous knowledges that provide compelling insights into all domains of human endeavor" (2008, p. 135).*

*This work is my humble attempt to help construct conditions from within the educational system whereby Indigenous communities bring their voice, worldviews,*

*preferences, philosophies, etc., to the very core. It is about providing a vehicle for system change that could ultimately benefit all students regardless of racial or ethnic identification.*

# Chapter 3: Methodology

## Review of Purpose of the Study

This study is situated in the realm of evaluation, yet is not an evaluation. Using phenomenological research design and grounded theory approaches, the study sought to create a thought model for evaluation methodology that is based on Indigenous research methodologies and Indigenous evaluation philosophies and in order to inform the approach to conducting evaluations of Indigenous education. It sought to model ways to be more responsive to, and reflective of, the values of the communities themselves while it gathered information about participants' educational experiences and their hopes for the future of Indian Education.

## Community Participants

The identified participants for the study were stakeholders connected with the Indigenous educational community in a major metropolitan area in the Midwestern United States. Participants were identified and recommended by an in-group member. The Indigenous community in this particular geographical area is relatively small and tight-knit. It is comprised of individuals and families representing tribal nations from across the United States and Canada, although they primarily identify as from the Dakotas, Wisconsin, and Minnesota. Despite their heterogeneous composition, they all identify as "Native American" or "American Indian" and see themselves as contributors to the Indian Education community in this urban area. The community has deep networks and connections. Members are often related in a community or familial way to one another. If they are not related to one another, they often are only one or two degrees of separation from one another. For these reasons, it is imperative that participants'

information be kept confidential. In collaboration with a leader in the Native American education community, the work was begun by selecting individuals with whom to engage in dialogue. Selection of participants began with individuals recommended by the community partner. The individuals included elders, leaders in the Indigenous education movement, former and current educators, parents, and community members. Students were not included in the study due to the protected nature of the population and due them currently being students, thus limiting their ability to provide retrospective analysis of their educational experiences. In addition, grounded theory required multiple responses and reactive responses that developed as a result of adult conversations. Additionally, youth involvement was not culturally appropriate at this point in the process. The participants were asked to share perspectives based on an initial set of questions about their expectations of education. Participants were asked for additional suggestions of individuals who might support or diverge from the initial participants' perspectives. Participants were also asked to provide feedback and corrections to transcriptions and coding of their responses. They were asked to provide input into the final product, as is appropriate when working within Indigenous communities.

The CP identified community members to include in the study. Initially, the participants were selected because they are American Indian elders with strong ties to the community who have much experience in Indian Education and have dedicated years to service in the community. These individuals can be said to have been successful in education due to their degree attainment and through maintaining work in a professional area for an extended period of time, regardless of their individual paths to that success. During the course of the interviews, the CP and PI made efforts to broaden the selected

participants to include community members who were current and former American Indian educators, mid-career professionals, and a recent college graduate.

This study intended to call on the experiences of urban American Indians. In talking with these individuals, many of them are hesitant to label themselves solely as urban. They come from rural and reservation communities via neighborhoods in the city to suburban or urban or rural habitations currently. Most, but not all, identified as belonging in more than one place. In particular, elders made a point to ground themselves in multiple physical locations. They come from rural and reservations areas in the Dakotas, Wisconsin, and Minnesota but also have deep and enduring ties to the urban area. Often, going home means "up north" or "back to the res'."

Ten individuals were interviewed, ranging from 24 years old to elders beyond their 7$^{th}$ decade. There were 7 female and 3 male participants. The participants were former students, teachers, parents, educators, administrators or individuals otherwise active in the community. They all demonstrated a high level of commitment to Indian Education and a willingness to share their experiences.

Despite the size of the urban area in which the study was conducted, the membership of the American Indian community, particularly those with strong ties to education, is relatively small. Therefore, in presenting these results, great efforts are made to protect the confidentiality of the participants, which means at times withholding certain information that could be helpful to the reader. Working in Indigenous Evaluation and Indigenous Education requires adherence to the belief that the data collected inherently belongs to the community and, as such, their wishes for confidentiality are followed closely.

## Cultural Protocols

Working in the community requires not only a connection with and guidance from a community member but there are also a number of other cultural protocols that need to be observed in order to conduct research, evaluations, or other studies in the American Indian community. The community partner provided guidance to the PI regarding appropriate cultural customs to follow. These protocols are somewhat flexible but traditionally those seeking advice or guidance should be sure to ask questions of elders and offer tobacco gifts as a sign of respect and indicating a commitment to being a partner in the work in a good way.

## Data Collection

Data collected included interviews and observations with partner participants. Field notes and audio recordings of reflections were maintained on the process. Data was collected though audio recorded interviews, coding, analysis, and feedback with participants. Moving away from a typical researcher-subject approach, the PI presented herself as a learner and deferred to the elder or participant to guide the pace and the tone of the conversation. These interviews were more like dialogues than question-and-answer sessions and the PI made sure to listen for the story as well as the space between the stories.

## Questions

The research questions were designed to be open-ended and flexible to the needs of the participants, and guided by the community partner.

The interviews began with an estimation of demographic information of the participants and included:

a. Tribal affiliation

b. Age

c. Gender

d. Role in the community

The questions guiding the remaining interview were:

1. Describe your educational journey.

2. What do you wish for your students from education?

**Analysis and Reporting**

Analysis of the data is presented in primarily a narrative format with commonalities and variances in points of view highlighted. The participants were invited to provide their insight into helping to creation of meaning from the transcripts of the interviews as well as coding categories, themes, and connections identified. Insights included reflections, affirmations, considerations, and recommendations. Ownership of data and reports from this study remain with the participant community.

A phenomenological study using narrative inquiry is the primary vehicle for data collection. This study also sought to develop theory grounded in the data regarding approaches to evaluation in Indian Education based on Indigenous research methodological practices.

**Data Collection, Findings, and Analysis**

Ten members of the American Indian educational community in an urban area of the Midwestern United States were interviewed in order to understand their personal educational journeys and their hopes for Indian Education. The purpose of the study was to provide a basis for future study on Indigenous educational evaluation that is responsive

to the needs of the community. Participants were asked: 1) Describe your educational journey, and 2) What are your hopes and expectations for Indian Education in the future? This qualitative, phenomenological investigation utilizes grounded theory in its approach gathering and understanding of the data.

A leader in the American Indian education community in a large city in the Midwestern United States was engaged in conversation about the potential need for examining the ways in which success in Indigenous education is measured. The Principal Investigator (PI) and the community partner (CP) discussed at length the issues related to measuring Indian Education programs and the challenges of generalizing research when working with urban, heterogeneous populations of American Indians. The CP affirmed the need for the work and offered assistance in working within the community for the purpose of creating a foundation toward measuring Indian Education outcomes that are responsive to – and directed by – the community itself.

The CP introduced the PI with the participants using an email as a follow up to previous in-person or telephone conversations he had with them asking for their involvement. Having their agreement to participate, the PI made initial contact via telephone call or email. Participants were reminded them that the CP had recommended them as valued individuals with much to contribute to this project.

Appointment times were set and 8 in-person interviews and 2 telephone interviews were conducted. At the beginning of the in-person interviews, the PI presented tobacco ties to the participants as a way of asking for their involvement and in thanks and appreciation for their time and their wisdom, as is culturally appropriate in this American

Indian community. With the telephone interviews, the PI offered sincere thanks and offered them the spirit of the tobacco offering, humbly asking for their time and wisdom.

The interviews lasted between 50 and 85 minutes and were audio recorded and transcribed. An initial review of the data was done to summarize, identify themes, and create broad coding categories, looking for commonalities or differences between participants' narratives. The transcriptions were reviewed line-by-line for key words and concepts. These concepts were then compared across all the transcriptions for emerging themes. Identified themes were filled in with detail from each transcription to complete the meaning under each theme.

After identifying initial keywords and potential themes, the transcripts and coding document was returned to each individual respondent. They were invited to review their comments, to add additional information, clarify, or edit these transcriptions. None of the participants chose to make any additions or edits to the interview comments at that time.

Several times throughout the process, the PI met with the Community Partner to discuss the progress and talk through responses while keeping the participants' identities confidential. These meetings became opportunities to clarify and verify initial findings and to include perspective from the CP's personal and cultural vantage point.

Once a draft of the findings was complete, they were presented to the participants for their input, feedback, edits, etc. Four of the participants chose to review the document and provided general feedback.

A final meeting was held with the CP to talk about the findings and to look for any unfinished business and to solicit thoughts on next steps based on this work.

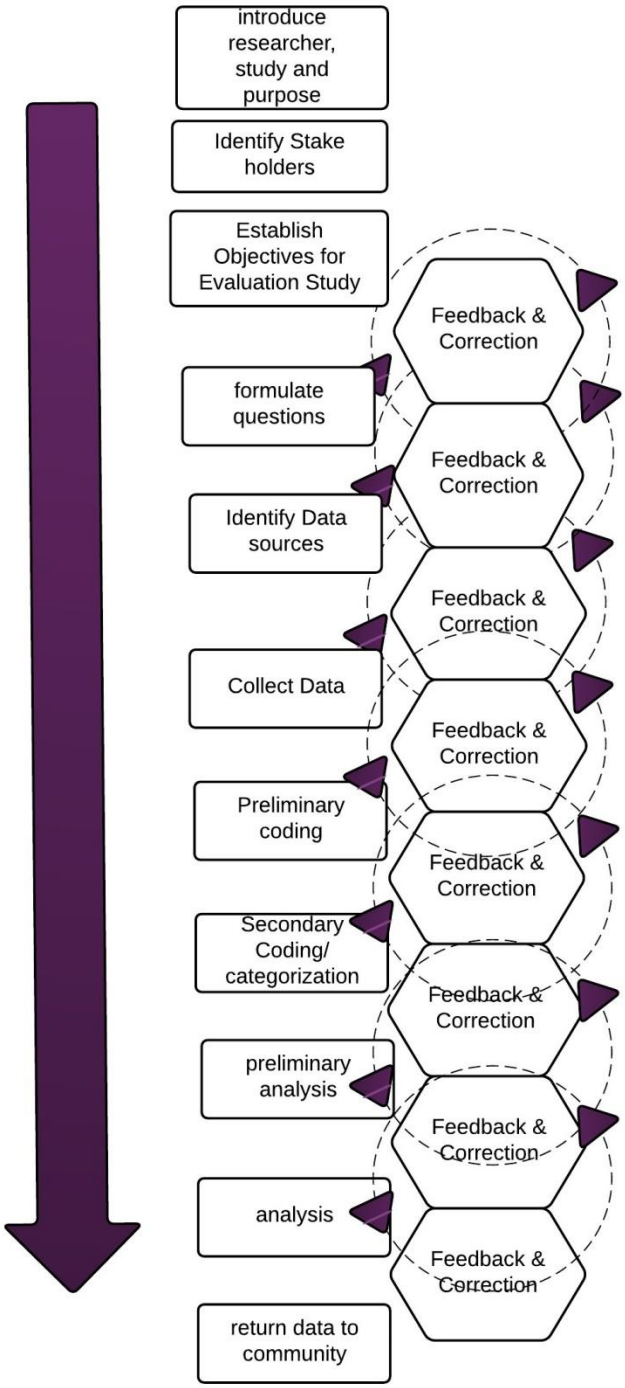


*Figure B.* Proposed feedback loop model when conducting evaluation in American Indian communities.

# Chapter 4: Findings

*With a kind smile on her face, topped with gentle knowing eyes, she looks at the stranger. Behind those eyes, she gauges this friend of a friend. Looking at her, into her, and through her. Discerning if she is trustworthy. Wanting to know her story and her intention. "What story should I tell this person?" she asks herself. She has told her story many times before. "How will it be used? Will it be used to reinforce what people already think they know about me? About our Indian people? Which story is safe to tell?" She has dedicated her life to understanding. To understand herself, to understand her history and the history of her family, to share her understanding with her students, to encourage them to understand themselves. "Will this White woman understand me? Will this work help my people to help themselves? Will it help other non-Indian people to understand us and to teach our children better?" She decides to tell a good story. Maybe not the complete story, but who is to say what is really the whole story? But it is a good story and it might be understood.*

## The Educational Journey

The participants in the investigation were first given an opportunity to describe their educational path, in whatever way they defined it for themselves. Unilaterally, the participants began with a description of their home lives from which unfolded the story of their own development and evolution through family and community relations to elementary and high schools to colleges, universities and beyond.

*The dialogues, while framed with two open-ended questions, were truly interactional. As a part of contextualizing my own experience, I shared some of my own*

*family and educational background and highlighting some common experiences in order to remove what could be perceived as a power differential and to be able to relate to one another's strengths and vulnerabilities on issues that can be deeply personal. As a licensed school counselor, I have much experience and training in counseling techniques. However, over the years of working in Indian Education, I have adapted my techniques to be more responsive to the interpersonal styles of my students or families. As in most interpersonal dynamics, two individuals adjust their interactive style to relate to one another. Applying this work to American Indian students, and in this case, the participants of this investigation, I followed the lead of the participant and allowed the conversation to flow as naturally as possible. Bringing an intentional and true appreciation for the individuals and their perspectives served as a foundation to the work that the participants and I did together. I feel fortunate that I was able to share with them as they told their stories and I attempted to do so with an open mind and open heart.*

The participants indicated varying degrees of family support in their formative years. Most indicated having experienced abject family or community poverty. The youngest respondent, who was raised entirely in an urban area and apart from her American Indian culture and whose parents were educated professionals, did not experience similar concerns of poverty. One participant described exposure during her childhood years to "very horrific things that I experienced that motivated me to leave the reservation …try to find a better way to live my life."

Most of the participants indicated seeing or experiencing some sort of abuse – chemical, physical, or emotional – in their homes, families, or communities as children. "Natives have so many issues that they deal with at home, that they bring to school.

Unless you live with them and see it, you are not going to know." One teacher recalled a time in class where young students shared with the class, 'My mom went to jail.' and then every hand went up… 'My daddy went jail too.' 'My mommy went to jail too.' 'My grand[parent]'... it is really sobering to me that these children … have already experienced that." The experience with incarceration in the community may be a response to historical trauma which has negatively affected so many aspects of American Indians' daily life (Brave Heart, Chase, Elkins, & Altschul, 2011, Brave Heart & DeBruyn, 1998; Grant & Gillespie, 1993; Morsette, 2012, Deschenie, 2006).

*While the participants were sharing these experiences, I noted them observing me, looking presumably for reactions of possible shock or sadness or judgment. Instead, I acknowledged the speaker, and showed respect to the story through verbal or non-verbal cues. At times, I acknowledged my own similar experiences. Upon reflection, I recognize both the commonalities of the narratives with my own experiences but also the difference that the position of privilege brings me even if we had experienced similar circumstances. I became aware of how that difference may play out in the expectations others have of us. When meeting someone (a teacher, for example), there is likely an assumption that the I, due to my privileged position as a white woman, have not had adverse experiences and there are most often corresponding high expectations accompanying those assumptions. When an American Indian student meets a teacher, there may be an assumption of adverse experiences and potentially corresponding diminished expectations. As I reflected further, I note my internal struggle over the years with being a non-Native educator working with American Indian students. Discussing with colleagues the advantages and disadvantages of working in "Indian Country" as a white woman, there*

*were certainly some American Indian educators who felt that this work, particularly in terms of any research, should solely be left to American Indians; they feel that I should not be doing this work in Indian Country. These were sometimes passionately stated perspectives that certainly gave the me pause. More often, however, American Indian professionals took a middle ground. They supported my work, both as an educator and as a researcher, citing the overwhelming need for qualified, well-prepared allies or ambassadors, particularly until such a time as there are sufficient numbers of American Indian professionals to do this work. Additionally, these colleagues engaged in discussions with the me about the characteristics needed in the individual educator as well as the need to share these approaches and ways of thinking with a broader audience, which would ultimately benefit American Indian students. If it was not for the support of these individuals, I am quite certain that I would not have been able to complete this project.*

The elder participants recalled early experiences where they or their families were hesitant to use their traditional language and lifeways, particularly in the schools or towns, due to racism or fear of repercussions from the general population or from government representatives. One elder explained that his parents believed it would be easier on the children to fit in with the general population of students and in the broader community than to be "Indian" in the city. Celebrating being American Indian was not a daily part of their experience. They often down-played being American Indian except perhaps in the home because it historically had not been safe to be "Indian" in all venues. It appeared to him that his family specifically avoided raising their children with a firm

grounding in their American Indian culture to protect them and he only grew to know cultural traditions and practices as he grew older.

A respondent summarized, “I don’t want [students] to lose who they are when they go to a public school.” Another described some key cultural teachings that weren’t understood or accepted in schools: “[We were taught] how do you respect the water, the trees, the air. We [humans] are the most pitiful of the creatures, because the water doesn’t need us. The trees don’t need us. Air certainly doesn’t need us, but we need every one of those elements around us. That to me is the pure essence of being Indian, which will teach you humility. It will teach you honesty. It will teach you respect. It will teach you love.”

*The above conversation, as well as others, reminded me of numerous conversations with students over the years who had asked questions about the nature of existence or who had shared perspectives on the way things were at school or elsewhere. This realization caused me to affirm the research and teachings about including elders in the conversations about what and how American Indian students are taught. The questions that the students have are the same things that the elders wish to share but that the schools tend to not address.*

The experiences of the younger participants varied. One mid-career male began to embrace his American Indian culture in his middle to high school years under the guidance of community members. Their guidance served to provide him a way to gather back his sense of self and to learn more about traditional cultural practices such as sweat lodge and ceremony. “I went to sweat lodges. They brought us to Sundance ceremonies,

[other] ceremonies. You would hear people speak their languages. Most of the boys walking around had long hair."

The youngest respondent reported having next to no experience with what it meant to be American Indian until she began to explore her American Indian identity in college.

All but one respondent indicated that their parents were not well educated. Most of the participants' parents, however, saw value in education for their children but lacked the resources and knowledge of how to help their children access education. One responded summed up the racism present not only in the educational system but in the non-Indigenous world using a quote from her mother, "You have to work twice as hard and be twice as good to stand a chance."

Comments by the participants underscored the work done by researchers such as Brave Heart, Chase, Elkins, and Altschul (2011) emphasizing the significance of the relationship between culture, historical trauma and identity.

A number of the participants indicated an internal motivation that they did not always see present in their siblings or peers, though they did not indicate to what to attribute their own motivation. Multiple participants indicated that there was someone in the educational setting, the community, or even from their family who "saw something in [me] that I didn't see." Messages received from these individuals who encouraged and supported the participants were not soon forgotten and appeared to be significant in their educational progress. It is apparent that participants believe that interpersonal connections made educational opportunities come to life for them.

One respondent tells her story of being a young, single parent working and attending university, beyond all odds, and having a college advisor encourage her, but more importantly, finding some internal strength to keep moving forward. Another tells of feeling called to make new choices that took him away from alcohol and incarceration down a path toward education.

The elder participants indicated a discomfort in large educational establishments when they were youth and young adults, preferring smaller educational settings that allowed for individualized instruction, hands-on learning, and the opportunity to build relationships. "[The school] is small. [It is] here to give you individualized attention, one on one." Tribal colleges and smaller colleges were also preferred. The younger participants attended larger universities but did find ways to get connected through smaller groups.

The claims of more personalized, smaller educational settings is reinforced by the work of Bishop, Berryman, Wearmouth, et al., (2012) and Jeffries & Singer (2003) wherein alternative educational settings are connected more strongly with American Indian ways of knowing and learning.

Overall, the participants' college experiences were challenging. Most of them transferred colleges at least one time. They report having felt discomfort, as if they did not fit in, and they saw very few American Indian students on campus. The significance of an individual and/or a small group to support and encourage them could not be overstated.

They reported bringing their own experiences with education with them as they moved into their own experiences as educators, as professionals and as parents or

grandparents. These experiences directly affect their perceptions of how education should serve American Indian students in the future.

**Hopes and Expectations**

The second question this study addressed was "What are your hopes or expectations for Indian Education?" This question, too, was most often answered by the participants through narrative. Often times the answer was embedded in the story the participants told. Listening through the stories and often giving reflective pause seemed necessary to glean the emerging meaning.

*In order to understand the narratives as fully as a non-Native person can, it was essential to listen fully. A large portion of the partnership with the participants was to listen well: listen for the words, listen for the intent, search for the story between the words (the underlying back-story that isn't told but must be understood, at least somewhat, for the rest of the story to have meaning). It was also essential to be quiet to allow the energy of the dialogue and of the emerging relationship to help guide the direction of the conversation. Part of the listening was to also reflect thoroughly, multiple times and over a long time span, on the conversations. The reflections were not simply about understanding what was said, but was also about unpacking the dominant narrative surrounding the way in which research is done and about the way those under Western influence have been historically trained to listen.*

From these narratives, several themes emerged. They pertained to identity, relationships and connections, elders and traditional learning, values and behaviors, the institution of school and its relationship to historical trauma, and family and community.

It is significant to note that these themes are not discrete and, and particularly in the relating of the stories, are inherently interrelated.

**Identity**

Of all the noted themes, "identity" was the most prevalent from all the participants. Participants stressed the importance of students knowing who they are, where they come from and having pride and a sense of self connected to an understanding of themselves individually, collectively, and culturally. They describe identity in varying ways. One respondent shared the desire for education to create a "foundation that values [students] and respects them and nurtures them and understands where they come from and building in that pride to be American Indian." Another stated, "I want them to be confident of who they are. Proud of who they are." Another expressed hope for "an education that values, validates them and recognizes that they are American Indian." Lucero (2010) describes the particular difficulty for defining identity among urban American Indians but emphasizes the importance of this development both in terms of their individual and their collective identity. As adolescents, the process of claiming both individual and collective identity can be challenging. Therefore schools, where students spend so much of their time, would be an appropriate venue to incorporate supports toward positive identity development. The absence of such supports might further discourage school engagement.

A strong individual, family, and community identity was described as a main medium for transmission of cultural beliefs, traditions, and ways of operating in the world. In some cases, the families rely on schools with an American Indian cultural emphasis to bring cultural components of identity to the students, as the families may

have had limited exposure themselves due to historical trauma due to colonization and the forced prohibition of their indigenous languages and traditions. There is a concern that as school culture begins to imprint on students when they reach upper elementary and middle school years and beyond, their identity is challenged, both by themselves and by others. They expressed concern that when students are not able to maintain or find connections to their sense of identity in their school settings, they become disengaged or get pushed out of school.

In comparing the importance of a strong sense of personal identity, one respondent questioned the value of achieving academic success if it does not relate to daily living and in connecting with others. She went on to emphasize that gaining life skills such as independence, accountability, responsibility, compassion, being grounded, and having a spiritual connection were as valuable, maybe more valuable, than formal education but these are hard to continue to teach when identity has been shaken or not strongly formed.

"When you ask me what's the value or meaning of education, of course in the mainstream society it's important, but when I look back in my mind in my life, I didn't see it the same way. I saw a preservation of myself. Rather than sell out or give myself to whomever, I had a pretty tough way of holding on to my identity, and to my soul."

Hand in hand with identity is the idea of acceptance. For example, participants discussed the significance of being included, brought into something, held accountable, tied to community, and enrolled into specific programs. The concept of acceptance, in this case, seems to connect the individual and his identity to a community.

**Relationships and Connection**

Participants brought up the role of the school in terms of fostering connection and relationships. The idea of relationships, social groups, and learning being intertwined was addressed in varying ways. An individual does not exist outside of the context of a group and the group forms the basis for collective knowing, which is at the heart of all knowing. Values of the community are taught and learned in community and reinforced socially in behaviors and self and group monitoring. Friere (2009), Reyhner (1992), and Chinn (2007) support the notion of learning being fostered through relationships.

Consensus through relationship is the foundation of the group worldview, also known as culture. "That's where that relational bit comes in. You've got to create a relationship between the student, and the teacher, and the family. Unless you've got that triangulation, give up trying to teach Indian children." Another respondent carried the concept of relationality even further:

"Indian people have the ... what do you call a transformational view of matter, where everything is relational. When go back to our creation stories, all of life is in a position of equity. We all have a place, and as long as we all respect each other's place, we shall flourish, and we shall have happiness and harmony, but once one of us starts to disfigure this way, then that means that others will be harmed by it as well. Then when you step across the gap here into mainstream society, you got to be 'successful.' You'll never be successful if you're this or that. What is success? You know you got the most toys, the most money, the most greed, you know, it hardly can be defended as goodness."

*It is often stated that the power of relationships cannot be underestimated when working with American Indian students. I have heard non-Native teachers agree and*

*share that this is true for all students. Research does support relationships as key to learning across all demographic groups. However, it has become even more apparent to me that the concept of relationship is not fully understood in education as it relates to American Indian students. Relationships go beyond helping a student feel comfortable and welcome. For American Indian students, I have been contemplating the further dimensions of the concept of "relationship" and about the primary valuing of connection, a collective effort toward something that those in relationship have created or agreed to create together. And then, of course, there are the dimensions of relationship that go beyond the human relationship or even what Western thinking identifies as animate; the connections between all things living and not, seen and unseen. I am curious about how educators could use the guidance of elders to examine and apply that deeper appreciation of the nature and purpose of relationships to change the dynamics of schools to better support American Indian students.*

**Family and Community**

Throughout the interviews, references were made to family and community. Examples in their responses and characters in their stories were parents or grandparents, children or grandchildren. In some cases, it was someone in the community or the in the school or university who was highlighted. The stories illustrated the importance of being connected to community. One respondent defined culture as a "deep connection to extended family."

Often schools expect families to participate but do not recognize or accommodate for the reality that many of them are currently struggling and have a hard time contributing. Financial, personal or family concerns make it next to impossible for them

to be actively engaged in their children's education. Participants encouraged schools to make it easier for families to have a positive experience while contributing even the smallest amount of time and support to their child.

Because of that deep connection with family and community, when home circumstances are difficult, it affects student learning in ways that makes school even harder. One participant suggested that schools be aware of – and work to counter – these home life stressors. "I know that there's a lot of dysfunction within our family systems, whether they be nuclear families or extended families…Something has got to happen to keep our Native kids interested, because by the time they get into that middle school and they're going through adolescence and all of that, it's like the damage is done. It's almost too late to try to fix it."

The importance of family and community relationships is repeated in the literature (Reyhner, 1992; Carr, 1986; Grant & Gillespie, 1993; Cardenas, 1996) and emphasized by participants in this investigation: "One of the classic things with Native kids is, 'Who is your relative? What do they do?' … So the teachers that did well with Native kids, they tended to honor and respect that and even use that in some way.

It was noted that creating crafts, which often is devalued in education as not being rigorous enough a pedagogical practice, can be a significant way to engage families, particularly families who have not had historically positive experiences with education. What a child has created can be significant in terms of what it represents to the families, connecting school, family, and culture, and are often proudly displayed on their walls or refrigerators. A respondent recounted how the family of a former student drove hundreds

of miles out of their way to include in ceremony an artifact their young child made in school.

**School and Historical Trauma**

Due to the negative experiences many American Indians have historically had with education, the school does not resonate in a universally positive way with American Indian families and students. Despite that, or maybe because of that, participants wanted educators to expect that students come to school with knowledge, that they have something to share, and that they are capable at very high levels.

Some of the participants hoped for more individualized education, wherein educators look for gaps in learning due to mobility and help solidify those academic foundations. They wished for teachers to find ways to motivate and engage students. They would like to see more modeling, holistic, interdisciplinary, and hands-on learning and teaching.

Participants often related their individual educational experiences to the ways in which the mainstream educational system tends to not make space for education that is intentionally based on the needs of American Indian students.

"Here's a very simple difference through education. … It's Indian people learn. Mainstream systems teach... That's the difference... Since time immemorial we've learned by watching, by listening, and by imitating or doing what we've heard or seen. That's the Indian mind. That's what's in our DNA. Mainstream systems don't know that, so they continue to force feed through discipline, through harsh actions, coercion, get us to ... You know it was very blatant and obvious during the boarding schools what the hell was going on. Well they just became a little more sophisticated about it and they're still

doing it." Another explained, "[We were teaching] Indian kids. The teachers, we – by and large – were white mainstream society. The power structure was white, and a lot of that is true yet today." And another, "I want to see the education structured in such a way that it fits [American Indian students'] way of thinking." Long have the arguments been made for American Indian control over American Indian education. (Beaulieu, 1990; Grinde, 2004; Reyhner, 1992; Szasz, 1999; Gross, 1972; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2008).

They acknowledged that the task of educating American Indian students – and of system reform to better serve American Indian students – is large. Multiple participants talked about "hope," "spark," or "light" that is present in students. They wanted teachers to find that spark, keep it lit, and continue to encourage hope while building on strengths. "I don't want them to lose that sparkle in their eye... I don't want them to lose their desire to learn. I don't want them to lose their creativity. I don't want them to lose who they are when they go to a public school."

*One of the interviews took place at a school where there were young American Indian children playing. They were joyous, smiling, happy, full of life and hope; just that spark that the elders described. In my daily work with American Indian high school students, I wonder where that joy went. Do the high school students feel that they must hide it or perhaps protect it? Wouldn't that be the goal: to do everything possible to make it safe to bring that hope back out?*

**Knowing What to Teach; Calling on Elders**

Several participants spoke in great detail about how they received information from elders about what teachings to bring to the students and the best ways to bring forward the teaching and learning. Beaulieu (1990) includes consultation with elders as a

key component to culturally responsive pedagogy for American Indian students. The process of getting approval from the elders is as important as the information itself in many ways. They made it clear that a college education is not sufficient to prepare people to teach culture or to teach culturally. Instead they recommended a system of mentoring and training for new teachers. They suggested that teachers should be more entrepreneurial, innovative, collaborative, and that they should make use of appreciative inquiry.

Participants questioned the limited expanse of educational content and advocated for inclusion of traditional life ways or cultural experiences. “Why can’t he put that, ‘[Attendance at] Sweat Lodge, August 13th’ [as a measure of educational growth]? These experiences are just as important on one’s educational path. Why can’t students who are going out to the sugar bush, or why can’t students who are going out ricing, why can’t students who are going out hunting, why can’t students who go to sweat lodge or go to ceremony, why can’t we include those experiences somehow as a part of their educational path?... Let’s include those experiences because I am sure that those experiences have improved their self-esteem, opened their eyes to more science.”

This study’s community partner added that the “why” of what is done is because general education does not address approaches that meet the specific needs for American Indian students. Instead, Indian Education makes efforts to support positive identify development, to support family engagement, and to advocate and support American Indian students in school. Themes found throughout the narrative connect directly to the philosophical underpinnings of Indigenous educational philosophy and evaluation theory, which encourages thinking beyond the commonly accepted Western worldview

(Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Brayboy, 2005; Bang et al., 2014; Chinn, 2007; Meyer, 2008; Reyhner, 1992).

**Feedback**

*The participants were connected to me through my community partner. Because these individuals hold this community member in high regard, and he does the same of them, I was very conscious of the responsibility to engage with these participants in the best way possible. It was important to honor all these relationships and I took that responsibility very seriously.*

The community-based, Indigenous approach to this work made use of frequent opportunities for input and feedback from participants. After review of one of the drafts, participants shared:

"I read the latest iteration of your paper and find it very wholesome and am pleased that it takes a new direction; not only in evaluation but the holistic realm of Indian people…You have described very well the parallels in thinking when working with the Indian mind or psyche. Just because Indians think about things differently does not mean they are beyond hope. Perhaps it is those who do not learn up on the Indian mind are the hopeless ones…I wish you well as you continue on with this endeavor. It is certainly refreshing to read your work."

And,

"Looks great to me! I like the focus on relationships and not having our cultures separate from education but in tandem with it."

*One participant elder asked me about what I thought I did that made a difference working with Native kids. It was difficult to answer as there was a risk; it meant being*

*vulnerable, potentially wrong, and potentially moving back into a space of speaking out-of-turn and not honoring the principle of humility. This work is not about my perspective, but rather that of the American Indian community members. However, to not answer would have meant changing the dynamic of the conversation and would have set myself aside from the dialogue. Given the elder's status, I was honored by the question. As I thought about this later, I began to consider again the nature of the responsibility of the work of an ally. There is much to consider on this topic and is worth revisiting. The focus of this work is not unrelated to the question of allyship as all things are related, however, this topic will be set aside keep the learnings focused on the lessons from the participants.*

## Chapter 5: Implications and Next Steps

*Humility is one of the seven grandfather teachings of the Ojibwe people. It refers to finding balance among all living things, to praise the accomplishments of all, and to strive not to become self-important (Georgian College Resources, 2016). This concept is one found in many Indigenous cultures. It can be one of my greatest personal and professional challenges. I think I understand things when I may not. I think I know the right course when there may be other ways. I speak when I should listen. I act when I should pause. The realization of this limitation has nearly paralyzed me in recent months in trying to finish this work. I continually ask myself if this is "my work" to do? What right do I have to carry this work? To whom will it be of value? Are my motives honorable and is my approach correct? I may have learned just enough humility to ask those in the American Indian community about their perspective of the needs and what solutions they envision. This has shifted this work and made it better, richer, and more significant. I do not purport that I have answers to the questions raised in this work but only that I am doing my best to share what I am hearing and learning from those who have their own frameworks for these same questions.*

This work began as an examination of ways that education for American Indian students is measured systemically, and is based on the reality that current measures consistently show American Indian students underperforming in comparison to their peers. When including thinking in the broadest sense about ways of knowing, Indigenous Knowledge, and theoretical foundations of evaluation and education among American Indian peoples, questions arose about what was being measured and why. It was necessary to pause the cycle of reviewing outcomes and laying the blame at the feet of

specific groups for perceived inadequacies and, instead, consider the larger questions of what is being measured and why. American Indian members of one urban Midwestern community were engaged to learn about what they hope education could accomplish for youth, grounded in their own personal educational journeys and experiences beyond their own schooling.

**Review of Historical Perspective**

The path the United States government took in its dealings with the American Indian populations was certainly one without humility. The government presumed to know the right course for those indigenous to these lands and overlaid their perspectives and opinions onto their rights. The educational system has become a manifestation of the mainstream's lack of humility and, thus, has many missteps to correct and needs to begin with a look at the "what" and the "why" of educational evaluation. The colonized mindset toward education has become embedded in our everyday lives as the standard and has left little room for Indigenous ways of knowing.

Beginning to unpack the ways the colonized mindset is evident in our schools can help us to not only measure the impact of Indian Education programs but the education of American Indian students in general educational institutions, and to adjust our pedagogy, curriculum and systems to better serve all students, and especially American Indian students. Much of what has been done in the past to measure the achievements of Indian Education has been without acknowledgment of the unique cultural and historical perspectives of American Indian peoples. Evaluation has consisted primarily of reporting test scores and graduation rates. Educators seem to be unable to determine what to do when American Indian student outcomes are consistently far below other demographic

categories. Countering those statistics with questions regarding underlying beliefs, leaders and educator could ask themselves if they truly believe that, year after year, American Indian students are unable to learn and achieve academically. These leaders can begin to look differently at measuring Indian Education by reviewing the extent to which programming supports and maintains student identity, involves family and community, builds and fosters relationships, considers carefully the curriculum and pedagogical approaches, and maintains a belief in students' inherent abilities while fostering an ongoing sense of hope and institute holistic measurements of those foundational achievements

**Limitations to the Study**

The results of this study are not generalizable, as they are specific to the American Indian participants from an urban Midwestern community in the United States. However, the implications may be extrapolated to future work in other communities by asking similar questions about what value or expectations the community itself has for education. Recognizing the uniqueness of the experience of American Indians in an urban setting is tied to embracing the heterogeneity of the individual experiences and identities. The needs of such heterogeneous communities are diverse as are the needs across American Indian communities from tribal areas, agencies, reservations, or other communities. What has been learned and shared can provide a foundation for further study of – and approaches to – appropriate measurement of programs serving American Indian students.

**Emergent Theory Based on Data and Tied to Current Thinking/Theory**

There are few studies published currently on urban Indians and education. Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) schools, reservations, and boarding schools all have garnered attention in research, however most of the studied populations are mainly homogeneous groups (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Jeffries & Singer, 2003). Urban Indian populations, in contrast, are diverse. The diversity takes its form in individuals and families that migrate to the city from various reservations, tribal nations, and communities but also in regard to the individuals that comprise those subsets of a population. The variance is due to a number of factors including personality differences, degree of tie to tribal nation traditional ways of life, adherence to values of the traditional nation and the ways in which those values are interpreted in the contemporary world.

**Complementarianism and Incommensurability in Education**

The colonizers' mindset, born hand in hand with the Scientific Method, gravitates toward organization, linear connections, isolationism, and disaggregation. Indigenous theory draws on cyclical patterns, relativity and relationships, the connections of parts to the whole, with the whole amounting to much more than the sum of its parts. It may be helpful to refer to these different concepts through the lenses of incommensurability and complementarianism. Incommensurability lays two concepts or ideals side by side and allows them to be incomparable, equally valuable, and neither is more right or better than the other and may not intersect while in some way addressing the same issue (Keddie et al., 2013). Complementarianism allows differing philosophies to coexist with grace, as each has their value and brings to the view a perspective that may be helpful (Castagno,

2008; LaFrance, Nichols, & Kirkhart, 2012). So it may be with the evaluation of Indian Education as compared with evaluation of mainstream educational systems.

The focus of this study was not to gauge the level of appreciation of current educational evaluation models, as much as to gauge potential new directions in evaluation that are reflective of the community. The participants in this study did not dismiss out of hand the educational evaluation measures that currently exist. Instead they enumerated valuable aspects of educational programs directed toward American Indian students that are not currently measured.

**Measurement as Engagement**

The responses in this study came overwhelmingly in the form of storytelling, wherein answers were offered as a narrative rather than as purely factual or a linear sequencing of events; answers came layered in this narrative. Mainstream American systems, in contrast, operate without primacy of the narrative and may feel abrupt and unidimensional to American Indian people. It is not just about communication styles. It is a need to strive to understand the context of the story from which information emerges and, further, anticipate that the topic at hand has the potential to impact people in ways that we cannot even fathom. For this reason, despite best intentions and taking care with the ways the work is done, it is important to consider and address the possible emotional stress or trauma that engaging in this sort of measurement may engender on the part of students, as well as family and community members involved with any evaluation process. Additionally, we must tread carefully in order to make some meaning and honor the story and the process as well as the outcome. Evaluation needs to be patient enough to give credence to the results shown in the narrative.

Perhaps, we are not measuring all that is valuable. There are individuals and families that have been successful in schools as they exist but many more do not succeed. Defining success and value in many of the conversations, we discussed what success for American Indian students would "look" like. It was difficult to arrive at a definition and, as is often the case, stories were the vehicle for describing someone or something that was successful. Some stories explained how the individual, family, or community values were at odds with the generally accepted academic measures of success or how an individual made decisions that might be perceived as less successful but fell in line with family or community values that may or may not have been evident in schools. When discussing what could be measured in educational outcomes, one respondent described the importance of measuring the cultural and traditional teachings as well as hands-on practical application of academic learning said, "I just can't believe that there would be a whole lot of negative things that would come out of trying to measure those experiences."

Even when circumstances are difficult at home, where historical trauma had a hold in the community and families, the connection, the love, the comfort, the values, the familiarity – the culture – were more reinforcing of identity development than the school. Where other students can use the school to overcome home life challenges through school because they see or feel an acceptance and way to become more of their best selves, it may be that American Indian students see school as a sell-out and abandonment of culture and a dismissal of the sacrifices of their ancestors. Where there is dissonance, there may be discomfort, which is not conducive to learning.

**Process as Outcome Measure**

Part of providing space for different points of view, includes looking at redefining the idea of "outcome." In the ways we currently measure education, the outcomes are considered results and final products, i.e., graduation rates and college matriculation rates. Using the concept of incommensurability, those measures could remain as part of the larger evaluation. It is equally as valuable, too, to also include processes – and what might be considered strategies – as actual measures. The way in which education is structured, the ways in which students and community are engaged, the way in which elders are consulted on what to teach, as examples, are approaches that could be measured to see whether or not the programming meets its goal of being a place that resonates with the community and reflects its values. These can become measurable outcomes and not just means to the end of currently measured outcomes such as graduation rates, college matriculation rates, and standardized test scores, etc.

The beginning of valid evaluation processes in indigenous communities (American Indian Higher Education Consortium, 2009) is to engage the community in a discussion of their needs from a program. The community designees evaluate, or guide an evaluation of, the programming in a holistic way. The community and evaluators could review, for example, some of the concepts that the participants in this study identified, and/or other items specific to their own community. Such a design of evaluation of Indian Education could ideally include the following:

1. Seeking to understand and identify the goals and outcomes for any program using the thoughts and perceptions of those for whom it is to be designed.

2. Collaboratively designing the logic and flow, benchmarks, processes, and metrics of the program with the community.

According to the interviews and analysis in this study and based on the themes identified and approved by the participants, evaluation design for programs serving indigenous youth in this midwest urban setting could include the following:

1. It is likely that a valid evaluation of American Indian education would include ways to measure the extent to which an educational institution fosters positive self-identity in its students. The struggle with identity is tied with the loss of power, both personal power and power of the group. Where historical trauma has removed power from the group, the individual may have become disenfranchised in the system and its iterations. Tied to working to strengthen identity, the measures would also include finding ways in which the school can deliberately work through the effects of historical trauma by acknowledging its presence, providing supports and allowing students to build on those narratives in positive ways.

2. Evaluation design could also include ways in which an educational system or institution involves family and community as a primary measure of success, rather than just as a stepping stone to end measures. The involvement of family and community is a cornerstone to traditional Indigenous life. The presence of judgment-free family and community education and involvement that makes it possible for the family to contribute in even a small way would be another potential outcome measure.

3. The extent to which the system builds and fosters relationships, again, could be an end goal, not solely a process toward results. Student support from caring, encouraging adults as a significant proved to be valuable to the participants in this study. Moreover,

being in strong relationship within the community, with families, and with schools is a goal itself, not as a way to other measures, but instead, as a primary goal for the ways in which students emerge as adults.

4. Including an examination of how the curriculum and pedagogical approaches are determined, including use of elders and community input and are reflective of the values of the tribal nation, is again, not only a process but is so significant that without it, the end results may not matter.

5. Part of valid cultural and community input requires that the system and individual professionals within it maintain a belief in students' inherent abilities and fosters an ongoing sense of hope. An application of this might mean assuming all students come with knowledge and by seeking ways to continually motivate and engage students positively with the "spark" that to which the study's participants referred.

**Implications for Non-Native Educators**

*Over the years, I have experienced some discomfort navigating the process, the ways, the relationships, the learning, as it is done in American Indian communities.*

*Imagine students and families feeling this discomfort every day. Then the school expects them to stay and do well and be successful. Why do they stay? What does the system, built on the back of trauma, unwittingly (or even knowingly) do to make them uncomfortable? It may be that they are just pushing through the discomfort and, sometimes, staying.*

*I hope I am relatively successful in working with American Indian students, staff, and families. But that is not for me to say. All I know is that I have stayed. But I had a*

*choice. American Indian students do not really have a choice currently about the structure of their educational systems.*

In education, the proportion of American Indian educators is not currently in balance with the number of American Indian students. That means many students are being educated by non-Native educators whose background and ways of understanding the world may be distinctly different from their American Indian students. It may be useful to improve educational outcomes and the implementation of more Indigenously appropriate processes by bearing in mind and finding ways to engage the concepts brought to light in this study. In particular, it is important to build into their very curriculum and pedagogy, the effects of knowing that strong, positive relationships are among the most significant aspects of working well in Indian Country.

**Broader Implications**

In addition to expanding how Indian Education is measured, broader applications of the concepts discussed in this work could apply to school systems, governmental entities, and non-profit or public agencies. On a Federal and State governmental level, policy makers and grantors would better serve American Indian students through educational programming if the reporting processes and reportable outcomes included holistic evaluations as well as – or instead of – currently used measures. This would encourage program leaders to deliberately engage communities in the process of evaluating Indigenous educational programs, ideally at the level of program conceptualization, thereby bringing to the programs themselves the strategies and interventions that the community believes would best serve their own students.

Non-profit agencies and foundations could support the development of professionals and organizations trained to work with American Indian communities and, what is more, build internal capacity for American Indian communities to conduct their own educational evaluations.

Community-based collaborations between schools, families, students, non-profit agencies, foundations, etc., could rise together to affect change not only in how programs are measured, but how they are actually designed and how they are connected to philosophy and world view.

**Summary**

Despite the current dishearteningly low rates of graduation, test scores, and college matriculation rates of American Indian high school students compared to their Non-Native peers, there are numerous reasons to be hopeful for the future of education for American Indian students. Building on the stated hopes of the communities and by including their own goals for education, not only can educational programs and systems be measured more holistically and appropriately for the communities, but they can also be developed to deliberately respond to those communities' values and belief systems through design. Attention to fostering a sense of identity, maintaining the primacy of relationships, ensuring that the education system and its curriculum is guided by elders in the community, and always promoting a sense of hope for students and families is a potential approach to improving mainstream outcomes for the population of this study. But, perhaps more importantly, these items may well be worthy of measurement in and of themselves to better align with the values of the community. The results may show

successes in what the communities desire for outcomes, and may also prove to be catalysts for improving outcomes currently measured.

Future studies may identify trends or commonalities in process-as-outcome measures between various American Indian tribes, communities, or nations. Additionally, future researchers might begin to test appropriate end-result measures for desired features of America Indian educational systems or programs. Additionally, providing workshops on seeking to know, identify, and support community-based values and valid measures should be provided to funders as well as local, state and federal governments, in order to begin to understand the differences in what matters most and ways of living between and among American Indian communities and mainstream communities. These differences need to be seen as strengths in order to think more broadly of social, political, economic, environmental, and culture issues. From these differences, and from asking to understand and align, can come possible solutions to address major current societal problems that affect any or all of us.

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